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SARA TUVAL BERNSTEIN

To my sister, Esther, and my friend, Ellen, who despite their youth so courageously survived the horror and the pain and to the memory of all the men and women who died locked in the cars when our train was bombed at Schwabhausen, Bavaria, on April 29, 1945.

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INTRODUCTION

Late one evening when all of my mother's step-children were visiting the neighbors, she heard the tramping of many feet on the path outside the front door and loud, excited voices. Exhausted after a long day of cooking and cleaning and heavy with her third pregnancy, my mother slowly rose from her bed and stumbled to the front door. Opening it, she was confronted by many of the workers from my father's lumber mill. "Is your husband here?" asked one of the men. "There's another peasant revolt. They're threatening to attack us and all the other Jews again."

"He isn't here," my mother answered. "He's in the northern part of Transylvania buying lumber."

"But we need Mr. Tuvel's help!" the man answered. "Are you sure he's not here?"

"Yes, I'm positive. I'm here all alone with my two little boys."

The man turned abruptly to the others. "I'm not so sure he's gone," he said. "He's probably in bed and doesn't want to get up--the old man!"

After more angry mutterings, the men left. My mother closed the door, climbed back into bed and tried to calm herself again. However, the angry mill workers, the threats of the peasants, had frightened her and she could not rest. Within a half hour she felt the stab of a contraction and then another, even though she was still in the eighth month of her pregnancy. Anxiously she thought of whom she might summon for help, but quickly realized that there was no one; the midwife could be reached only by horse and wagon

and the closest neighbor lived three miles up and around the mountainside.

As the contractions came closer and closer, the cold night wind crashing against the windows with each new gust, my mother realized that she could not risk going out into the darkness. Within several hours she gave birth to me by herself, the wind howling all around the house isolated at the foot of the mountain, howling through the trees bending over the roof in low, swishing arcs. I was born gasping, my small, frail cry rising above the wind, on April 25, 1918, and was named Seren.

CHAPTER ONE

Rounding a curve in the path I saw it--a long caravan of red and cornflower blue wagons covered with yellow, rounded roofs slowly winding its way to a meadow on the edge of the village. An old man turbaned in black, smoking a long, black pipe, strolled beside the lead horse and wagon. Behind him jangled eleven more horses and wagons, the pots and pans inside bouncing up and down to the rhythms of the clopping horses. "I'll just go a little bit closer," I decided and skipped along a back road circling the meadow where the gypsies would camp.

At the edge of the field I stopped near a small grove of oaks and hid behind the largest tree. Very carefully I inched my head around the trunk. A wagon was pulling up only a few meters away, the small front wheels glinting in the slanting sun's rays, the larger wheels following behind. A man with wavy dark hair and a bushy beard jumped down as soon as the wagon was still and looked around quickly with glistening eyes. I ducked back behind the tree. "What if he's seen me!" I thought, my heart bumping wildly in my chest and thumping aginst the tree. My father's warnings rang in my ears. "Don't you go near the gypsies!" he had shouted at breakfast. "They kidnap children. Do you want us to find you dead in some ravine?"

The gypsy man said something then in a language I did not understand. A woman's soft voice answered him. A baby's laughter rippled through the warm, still air. I peeked out again. The man was pulling wooden poles from the rear of the wagon, his white smock and loose trousers flowing with the

quick movements, so unlike my father in starched shirts and pressed pants walking stiff and straight. In a few minutes the man had crossed the poles together and set them up to form two large triangles, joining them with another pole. Then he and a woman wearing a scarlet, lacy shawl draped heavy green and gold rugs over the framework. Finally they carried a cradle from the wagon and hung it like a hammock stretching from one side of the tent to the other. When it was finished the woman took the baby from the wagon and placed it in the cradle. With one, smooth movement she slipped the shawl from her shoulders and draped it over the baby. The winds, gently lulling the baby back and forth, played among the fringes.

As it grew dark the woman hung a black kettle on an iron frame and began to stir something in it, the man standing to one side, a violin in his hands. As flames began to flare up into a fire that crackled and spit under the cooking pot, the man pulled his bow across the violin. A melancholy note eased into the gathering blackness, raised one tone, hung in the sudden stillness for a long moment after the bow was lifted. The man bent his body into the fire and then away from it again as he moved with the dance tune he began, beckoning the other men to come. They drifted from the other wagons, violins in hand, blending with the same tune, varying from it in high, lilting arcs and then merging with it once more.

Suddenly I realized that it must be quite late, that Father was surely home from the mill, that my older half-sisters and half-brothers as well as my full brothers and one sister were all sitting around the table, the prayer already said, my mother wringing her hands and asking, "What has happened to her now?"

I crept away from the tree, walked to the back road and began to run, the lanterns from the villagers' houses lighting my way. As I started up the path to our house on the side of the mountain, my head down so I would not stumble over a root, I smashed into something soft.

"Whoa!" someone yelled.

I looked up. My oldest half-brother, Herman, was standing in the path. "You almost knocked me over!" he said. I knew he had been sent to look for me, and I was glad it had been him. Although Herman was very tall and fair like my father, he did not have his disposition. "I bet I know where you've been," he teased. "Youve been to see the gypsies and one has asked you to marry him and run away forever!"

I did not answer, only looking way up towards his blue eyes.

"And may I ask what is his name?" he continued.

"He didn't tell me," I answered. "I didn't ask."

Herman laughed, a rich laugh coming from deep within his chest. "Well, Father will have something to say about this, I'm sure."

"Is he angry?"

"Let's say he is not in the best of moods. Come! I'll race you back!"

When I arrived at the long red house the lumber company provided for us, everyone was sitting by the table stretching almost the entire length of the kitchen. "Look who's here!" yelled Mendel, my second oldest half-brother. "It's about time you came home!"

"She should be spanked!" said Rose, my youngest half-sister. "If she were my child I'd give her a good whipping. Thank goodness I don't ever plan to have any children!"

"She's not even wearing a sweater!" said Louise, the middle half-sister. "No wonder she's always sick! She doesn't dress properly. Then she runs off until it's pitch dark. Who knows where she goes or what she does."

"If only Father didn't have all these older children," I wished for the hundredth time. "If only he had been young and alone when he met my mother instead of an old man with seven spoiled children. If only they were all married and gone . . . "

"Silence!" my father roared then. Everyone quickly looked at his or her plate. No fork was lifted. Quiet hung in the usually clanging kitchen.

"Where have you been?" he said then, spacing each word separately.

I looked at the floor, longing to climb under the table and hide among the benches where Zipporah and I often played with our dolls. I could think of nothing to say. I could not tell about going to see the gypsies after he had forbidden me not to go.

"Since you will not answer me, you will go to bed without supper," my father said. "Now!"

I went to bed feeling alone, friendless. Later Mama came quietly to the bed I shared with my little sister, Zipporah, and whispered, "I've brought you some bread and cheese and a little milk."

"Thank you, Mama," I whispered back.

"You must not disobey your father. Do you know that?"

"Yes, Mama."

"Do you promise?"

"Yes, Mama."

"Good! Sleep well," she said as she bent to kiss me good night. As she left the room again I thought, "I will never leave Mama. Never!"

The next morning when I came into the kitchen I was expecting everyone to scold me again. Instead, Mama and my three half-sisters were talking, seemingly all at once.

"It's only two more weeks until the wedding!" Louise was saying.

"It will be fine!" Mama answered. "I'm starting the pies today. They'll keep in the pantry. It's still ice cold in there! The cakes I'll do next week. The invitations have been sent and the neighbors have all agreed to take in guests during the wedding."

"Where will Béla's family be staying?" Louise asked.

"With the Goodmans."

"He'll probably break their bed," Mendel laughed.

"Oh, be quiet!" Rose yelled. "Béla is big, but at least he's not a lazy oaf like you!"

"Please don't talk about my fiance like that," Louise said,her voice trembling. She was the most delicate and tiny of my three half-sisters. No one could understand why she had picked huge, burly Béla for a husband.

"It's all r-r-right," Berta said, putting her arm around Louise. "B-B-Béla is a good man. We all like him. A-A-And you found him without a m-m-m-m-matchmaker!"

While Berta was my oldest half-sister, the fairest of them all in my opinion, she was still at home, single and nearing thirty in a time when many girls married at the age of fifteen or sixteen. As I grew older I realized how intelligent she was. Yet she was not as beautiful as Louise or Rose, her face broad, her speech halting.

"The dressmaker still has to do the final fitting on my gown," Louise said then. "I think she's ready for me now."

"Oh, can I watch?" Rose asked. "I wish it were me. I can't wait until it's me!"

The three girls went to the spare bedroom where the dressmaker had been working for weeks, sewing Louise's gown and all of her trousseau in addition to the rest of the family's wedding apparel and any other new clothes we had needed.

My three half-brothers, Herman, Meyer and Mendel, ambled into the front yard to see if they could find something to amuse themselves. My mother was left alone with all of the work. She would not think of asking one of her step-sons to bring in a pail of water or one of her step-daughters to knead some bread lest she be regarded as a cruel step-mother. Since she did not ask for help, they did not volunteer any. Instead my mother would assign many tasks to us, the four children born to my father and her after their marriage. "Pick some beans for supper," she would tell Eliezer, the brother two years older than I, "and have Seren help you." Until Zipporah grew older Eliezer and I had more than our share of work. Shlomo, the first child born to my mother and father, had been sent to the yeshiva to become a rabbi whether he wanted to be one or not. He was home only on holidays. He was now nine years old, Eliezer, seven; I, five; and Zipporah, three. In another year Esther, the last child, would be born. There had been one more child, David, in my father's first family but he had become ill with meningitis and died shortly after my father and mother were married. Since then Herman had married a vivacious girl named Tamara whom he met while serving in the Romanian Army. The two of them lived in the neighboring village, but one would never know it as they were always at our house, idly chattering with all the others.

On this particular morning I was sure that I would have to watch Zipporah so my mother could bake in peace. I did not mind the daily chores Eliezer and I had, either tending the geese or washing the dishes, but I could not understand why I had to do more than this while my older half-brothers and sisters gossiped the day away. Tucking my doll under my sweater, I began to edge towards the front door, planning to escape to my new hiding place high in the hayloft. There the yellow shafts of light fell on me, on my doll cradled in one arm, on the sacks on goose down all around me. I liked nothing more than to lie in the sweet hay, dreaming of the time when I would be able to go to school and learn how to become someone very important.

"Seren," my mother called as I was almost out of the door.

My heart sank. So she had seen me. "Yes, Mama?" I answered.

"Would you be a good girl and watch Zipporah for me this morning? I know you would like to play, but I do need your help. I have to make five different kinds of pie today. Will you watch her?"

"Yes, Mama."

"What a sweet child you are!"

"No, I'm not a sweet child," I thought to myself. I did not always like Zipporah. She would never listen to me, even though I was two years older than her. When I told her to stop chasing the geese or to stay away from the mill yard she laughed and went right on doing what she wanted. It made me furious.

For the next two weeks I supervised Zipporah almost constantly while the pies and cakes and breads piled up high on the pantry shelves high above my reach. The wedding celebration would last for three days and nights--enough time to eat all of these and more. My mother's aged mother and one

brother, my Uncle Louie, were coming. All the people from the Temple at the mill were coming, the ones my father invited home for a glass of wine and cake after every service. Even distant cousins were coming, planning to make a vacation of the event by staying as long as possible.

The first day of the wedding was clear and dazzling, as my mother had hoped. The chuppa was set up in the spacious side yard near the garden, the fragrance of lilacs drifting through the still air all through the ceremony. "Louise is so beautiful," I thought as I watched her drifting around and around under the chuppa seven times, Rose on one arm and Berta on the other, her long black hair a shadow under the veil that covered her head and eyes. "I don't know whether or not I would like to get married someday," I thought, gazing at the silken, glistening dress, "but I would love a gown like that."

When the ceremony was over, the feasting began, the music began and for three days and nights I wandered about, mostly listening to Uncle Louie argue with my father. It amazed me that anyone would dare to disagree with anything my father said. That Uncle Louie said things like, "Temple is a complete waste of time. I believe none of it!" utterly shocked me. My father would listen to this sacrilege and declare, "If you were not my wife's brother I would forbid you to enter my house!" Uncle Louie simply smiled and helped himself to another piece of challah, lathering it with a thick layer of butter.

In the evenings the gypsies came and we all gathered in the large, open hall at the mill where the Saturday night dances were held. The lead violinist would strike up a fast dance tune, tapping his leather moccasin against the floor with a soft thudding, the accordianist would join him and in an instant all of my brothers and sisters were dancing: Herman with his young wife,

Tamara, the ribbons from her newest hat fluttering around her long, flying hair; Mendel, the Casanova of the family, invariably holding the prettiest girl of the village in his arms; Meyer, my quiet brother, dancing with an equally silent girl; Berta, slowly gliding back and forth with some kind uncle who had asked her to dance; Rose, passing from one young man to another all evening long; and Louise, held like a porcelain doll in the arms of her new husband, Belá. My mother sat on the side happily watching, Zipporah asleep on her lap. My father kept his tradition of dancing only at weddings and performed his special dance, which we called the Tuvel Wedding Dance, in the middle of the evening.

Shlomo, home from the yeshiva, darted around the dance floor, often pummeling a cousin with his fists until an uncle came along and lifted him up by the seat of his pants. Eliezer sat quite still beside my mother, not saying more than two words all evening. Mama often called him her, "La un caos o linguritza (a teaspoon every hour)." He talked so seldom that it was as if his words were doled out one by one. Although Eliezer and I had very different personalities, I loved him dearly.

On the last night of the wedding, a Thursday, I went up to him sitting alone and said, "Come, Eliezer. Dance with me!"

He looked down at his shoes, the back of his neck turning a deep red.

"Will you?" I asked again.

He continued to look at the floor, not moving. "No, thank you," he finally said.

"All right," I answered. "I'll go outside and find something else to do."

I wandered from wagon to wagon parked along the road to the mill, the

horses already harnessed for the trips home. At the end of the evening the guests would all begin their journeys back, some traveling all night. I stopped behind one wagon, intrigued by the soft, down comforters piled up at one end of the straw bedding. Exhausted after the long days and late nights, I decided to climb into the wagon for a minute and rest. Lying down in the space under the high seat at the front end of the wagon, I pulled a comforter over me. Through a knothole in the boards a single star twinkled.

"David!" a woman was calling. "Oh, David! Who is this?"

I opened my eyes. The bright sun was shining in them, making me blink. Hurriedly I pulled the comforter off and climbed out from under the seat. I did not seem to be at home.

"Isn't she a Tuvel child?" a man was saying.

"Why, yes. That's who she is--Miriam and Abraham's little girl. But how did she get there?"

"She must have crawled in there last night and fallen asleep. We had a stowaway!"

"We must take her right back!" the woman answered.

"We can't do that, Rebeccah. If we start back now we'll have to travel on Shabat. It's forbidden."

"But what will we do? Miriam and Abraham will be so worried. Won't they? Won't your mother and father worry?" the woman asked me.

"Maybe they won't miss me," I answered. "I have so many brothers and sisters."

The man laughed and lifted me from the wagon with big, heavy arms. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"A little," I answered.

"Come, child. What is your name?" the woman asked.

"Seren."

"Come, Seren. I'll get you some breakfast. We won't be able to take you home until Sunday, the day after tomorrow. I do hope your poor mother doesn't make herself sick with worry."

For two days I stuffed myself with potato dumplings and chocolate cake. In the afternoons I spent long, peaceful hours playing with a litter of kittens in the barn, their furry bodies like soft balls in my hands. It was wonderful to be the only child, to have Rebeccah offer me dessert even if I had not finished all my carrots, to have David pull me onto his lap before the fire in the evenings and tell me funny stories.

Finally, early on Sunday morning, we set out for Füleháza in the wagon, hoping to reach our house before dark. All day we traveled, the small bay mare pulling us over the streams, in and around the Carpathians, through the thick forests of Transylvania. By dusk we were bouncing into the yard. Although it had been only three days since I left, the house looked somehow unfamiliar. It was the first time I had been away and I felt like a stranger seeing it for the first time--the wide wooden house with the kitchen running all along one side, the mill beyond, the piles of lumber, the long, low dormitories for the workers, and the river, the Mures, ever flowing down the mountain's side.

I jumped down from the wagon and ran to the house while David was still tying up the horse and Rebeccah gathering some boxes from the wagon. I opened the door quietly and walked softly into the hall, hoping no one would see me and I could listen for a moment to everyone chattering over supper and see if Father was angry. However, the clinking of silverware, the scraping

of bowls, did not greet me. Rather, I heard a low droning coming from the sitting room opposite the kitchen and across the hall. Listening for a minute I recognized some of the words of the Kaddish, the Prayer for the Dead. "Someone has died!" I realized with a shock. "Maybe it was Grandmother. She was so old. It must have been her."

I crept to the doorway and peeked in. All of my older sisters and brothers, my mother and my father, sat on low stools, their feet covered only by stockings, heads bowed. My father's suit coat was torn, Meyer's, Herman's and Mendel's coats as well. Mama and my sisters were all crying, the tears running down onto their collars, collecting on the torn edges of their sleeves. They were surely in mourning. It was Grandmother who had died; I was convinced. A tear slid down one cheek.

Very quietly I tip-toed into the room, sinking down at my mother's feet. As I entered I heard a gasp and before I knew what was happening Mama had grabbed me from behind, holding me so hard that I could barely breathe.

"Sereń . . . Sereń . . . Sereń . . . " she was saying over and over, the tears washing down her face.

My father's face loomed before me, strangely pale. "Where did you come from?" he asked, his voice much quieter than I had remembered.

By then Rebeccah and David had entered the room. "You're in mourning," Rebeccah said. "Please forgive us for disturbing you. May I ask who has died?"

Herman began to shake with deep, rolling laughter. Then he burst out, exploding with joy, his laughs bouncing all around the quiet room. David and Rebeccah stared at him as if he had gone beserk with grief. "Don't you know what happened?" Herman finally asked.

David and Rebecca shook their heads silently.

"Seren just disappeared!" Herman shouted between bouts of laughter. "We couldn't find a trace of her!"

"And since the gypsies were here when she disappeared and were gone the next morning," Tamara added, "we were sure they had kidnapped her for spying on them. We thought she was dead--thrown in some ditch where we would never find her."

I looked at my mother, at the deep circles beneath her red eyes. "Did you really think I was dead, Mama?" I asked.

She hugged me to her again. "I'm afraid so. I'm afraid I did," she said. "But you're back. That's all that matters!"

"I'm very sorry that we couldn't let you know she was with us," Rebecca said. "I'm so ashamed. I knew you would worry. We wanted to turn around and come right back when we found her on Friday morning in our wagon, but it would have meant traveling on Shabat."

"It's all right," my mother said. "Come, eat! The neighbors have been bringing food ever since they heard that Seren was gone."

We all piled into the kitchen. My older brothers and sisters scolded me repeatedly throughout the meal. "You'll never live this down!" Mendel said.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, worrying us so!" Rose said.

I said nothing, wondering why my father sat quietly at his place at the head of the table. His goatee, that grew little icicles on the coldest winter days, had not stopped trembling since I entered the house. Finally he said, "Seren, I would like to see you in the next room."

I glanced at my mother. She looked back at me with eyes so full of love that I had to look away. Quickly I followed my father into the sitting

room. He took down the strap from its hook by the fireplace, the strap he had never used on me, and beckoned me to come. I kneeled across his knees. The strap came, "Whap! Whap! Whap!" across my bare thighs. Then he stopped. "You must never do anything like that again!" he yelled. "Do you understand?"

I nodded, yes.

"Go then!"

Late in the evening, when my father was safely in bed and the dishes washed and put away, Tamara said, "Let's go down to the river to see the lights!" We trailed after her to the grassy slopes and gathered on a little knoll above the water. It was from this spot that I watched the washerwoman who came to our house once a week. After the clothes had soaked all night in a huge kettle on the stove, the washerwoman brought them down to the river to beat against the large rocks. I loved hearing her flap a shirt or linen against a boulder over and over, the mountain answering her with echoes drifting back across the water.

Tamara had brought her guitar which she carried everywhere, taking great delight in singing for us. Her voice was the most beautiful I had ever heard, rising and falling in the dark, starlit night. She sang of maidens, of spring, of a child lost in a storm.

"Look!" she cried then. "They're coming!" Log rafts were floating on the river guided by solitary men, one on each raft. Each man held a lantern to guide him through the night. As the rafts drifted downstream we counted them--one, two, three, four, five flickers of light silently bobbing away from us, wavering into the darkness.

CHAPTER TWO

That summer day in 1924 when I was six began like any other in Fülehaźa--clear and slightly chilly. However, by mid-morning when the sun had crested the mountain tops and warmed the air, I felt for the first time the fear and sorrow that came from being one of relatively few Jewish people in the midst of a nation where Greek Orthodoxy was the state religion.

As I was going outside to the swing under the tree in the back yard, one of the men from the mill came running up to the house. "Where's your father?" he asked me in one, quick burst of breath. I imagined that my father was at the mill, but since I was not sure I hesitated. Then my mother opened the door and was startled by the man who was still gasping, trying to catch his breath.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is it Mr. Tuvel? Is he hurt?"

"No, no, I have to find him. Isn't he here?"

"He left early this morning to look at some timber. He should be back soon. What's wrong?" asked my mother.

"I just saw all the men from the sheriff's office board the train going out of town. The students must be on their way here. We've got to decide what to do!"

The color quickly drained from my mother's face. "Oh, no," she whispered.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," the man yelled as he ran towards the mill.

"Who are the students?" I asked my mother, following her back into the house. "Are they from the school in the village?"

"No," she answered. "These are older students from the Gymnasium in Bucharest. When they get bored during summer vacation they form a mob and go from village to village."

"What do they do in the villages?" I asked.

My mother looked into the distance, into the valley flowing down outside the window for a long time, saying nothing. Her eyes were narrowed, lines spreading across her forehead. Finally, she pulled me to her and said, "It's all right. Don't worry. It's all right."

Of course, everything was not all right or she would not have said that it was. I went back outside pretending to return to the swing. Instead I edged around behind the mill where I saw a whole group of men standing together. Now I knew something was seriously wrong. My father's presence was felt at the mill even when he was not there; no one simply stood around during working hours. Slowly I crept forward, finally reaching a pile of boards close to where the men were standing. It was perfect. I could hear every word from my hiding place.

"Look what happened in my cousin's village!" a worker named Albert was shouting. "When the mob came they rampaged through the village for the entire night. Not one Jewish household was left unharmed. My cousin and his family barely escaped with their lives. After they had run away from their homes with only the clothes they were wearing, they climbed on the top of a hill overlooking the village. Flames burned through the darkness where moments before their homes had been. The only houses left standing were the non-Jewish peasant huts on the outskirts of the village. Thank God my brother had room to take them all in."

"But do you think they will really bother with us?" asked one of the new workers. "In my village the Jews were never burned out. We are so remote here at the mill, and there are not many of us. They might think we are not worth their trouble."

"Worth their trouble?" yelled Albert. "A handful of Jews is worth their trouble! One, solitary Jew is worth their trouble! We can't just stand here and do nothing. Why do you think the sheriff and his men left town? To give the students free rein--that's why! They can have a day off and the Jews can learn a lesson, all at the same time."

This was far more than I wanted to hear. I did not want to picture my home going up in flames, my family and I left with nowhere to go. There were so many of us. Who could take us in? Suddenly I remembered my doll and all of the clothes I had carefully made for her. Running as fast as I could, I hurried back to the house and to my room. She was still there! But where could I hide her where the students would not find her? Eliminating one place after another, I finally settled on the hole in one of the apple trees in the garden. I ran to the tree, taking along only her finest dresses, wrapped my doll and her clothes in an old cloth and stuck the bundle down into the hole. "Don't worry," I said to her. "It's all right."

When I got back to the house my father had returned and was talking to some of the men from the mill. I felt very relieved, for my father was not one to simply allow anyone to destroy everything we had. The men at the mill were the same. I had heard my father say how fortunate he was to be able to hire dedicated, hard-working Jewish men. Since Jews were forbidden by law to own land or hold a government position, many of the young men who could not afford to go out of the country for a college education worked at

my father's mill, learning the trade from one of the best mill managers in Romania.

Our family and the mill workers were particularly vulnerable to the student mobs, as there were no longer any other Jewish families in Füleháza or nearby; they had all escaped to a large city like Targul-Mures where they could live with a number of other Jews and feel safer.

"I think the best thing to do," my father said, "is for everyone to gather inside our house once it begins to grow dark. The small children will be taken away from the house just in case anything catches on fire. But I don't think that will happen. We'll barricade ourselves inside and lock everything up tight. If they do break down the front door we'll throw pots of scalding water on them. That should slow them down! Now let's get to work and bring in all the water we can."

The rest of the day went by in a flurry. Men ran in and out of the kitchen constantly. My older sisters fretted over possibly losing their newest supply of dresses. My mother rushed around the house trying to find still another kettle to hold water. I decided that the thing for me to do was to remain out of the way. Sliding a book under my skirt, I slipped off to the apple tree, checked on my doll once more and sat down to read.

Immediately after supper, Eliezer, Zipporah, baby Esther and I were taken outside to the garden by Tamara. She placed some blankets under the large, spreading oak tree at the far end of the garden. "Lie down and try to go to sleep," she said. "Would you like me to sing to you? It's a lovely evening. I'll sing you a song about the evening." She sang to us there under the tree, a slow, quiet song about the setting of the sun over the quiet meadows.

I had no intention of falling asleep. Who would watch my apple tree in the orchard on the other side of the garden if I fell asleep? However, by the time the sky had lost all traces of light and the fireflies were beginning to dart here and there among the flowers in the garden, I decided to try and rest after all. Nothing was happening anywhere that I could see. I lay down and tried to go to sleep. Eliezer and Zipporah were sprawled next to me on one blanket and Tamara was curled around the baby on another, all sound asleep, their heavy, peaceful breathing mingling with the rustling of the leaves in the cool, night wind. I could not stop thinking about the student mob. Would they hurt my mother, my father? If only I could see something! All the lights inside the house had been turned off to make it appear as if everyone were in bed asleep. The only light still burning was the one outside the front door as it was controlled by a switch at the mill and turned off automatically at midnight.

Hour after hour went by as I watched that light flickering hesitantly in the darkness. Sometimes I thought it had stopped shining altogether, but then it would appear again from behind a cluster of leaves swaying in the breeze. Finally, I decided that I could not stay away any longer. Very quietly I began to crawl off the blanket while everyone slept on peacefully. Suddenly Tamara's regular, soft snores stopped for a moment, and she seemed to breathe not at all. Then her arm moved to her face as if by itself, settled on her cheek and her regular breathing began again.

Quickly, I ran out of the garden and down to the house. Everything was quiet and still; even the crickets on the lawn had stopped their chirping. Then a terrifying thought overcame me: the students had come in through a back window and taken everyone by surprise. Everyone inside was dead!

Frantically I reached for the door latch, but it was high above my outstretched arm. With little leaps I jumped up and down on the porch, my hand thumping against the door with each try.

Suddenly, the door opened inwards. In the instant it took me to fall across the door sill I saw a huge, steaming kettle of water poised above my head.

"Stop! Stop! Don't throw it!" yelled my brother, Meyer. It's Seren."

"Seren!" shouted my father. "What on earth are you doing here? Why didn't you stay in the garden like you were told? You could have been scalded if the porch light hadn't been on!"

He pulled me inside. My father and the other men had mistaken my thumps against the door for attempts by the students to break into the house. While they were relieved that it was only me, they did not give up their vigil. The rest of the night was spent keeping watch while I slept peacefully in my bed. Once I awoke with a start, thinking, "My doll! She's still in the tree!" Just as suddenly I fell asleep again. The students never came, but later we heard that they had totally destroyed a village heavily populated by Jews the very same night.

All during the remainder of that year I thought, "Only one more year and I will be able to go to school in Füleháza!" The thought of leaving my mother and being with other, strange children all day frightened me somewhat. However, I could not wait to learn as much as possible about everything there was to know.

When I reached seven, the age for beginning school in Romania, I was still small--too small, my mother decided. "By next year you will be a year

older and a year stronger," she told me. "Four kilometers is a long way to walk. Think of when the snow comes! It will be terribly cold! You are so small that you might get lost in a storm. You'll be bigger next year. Then you can go."

I did not believe for a minute that I would get lost in a blizzard. I always knew exactly where I was and besides, I could hang on to Eliezer's coat when the snow was falling thick and fast. However, no one ever listened to me. To my great disappointment, I was kept home for another year.

The year passed somehow and finally one crisp fall morning in 1926 I started off for the village school with Eliezer. "What is the teacher like?" I asked. "Is he terribly strict?"

After what seemed forever, Eliezer answered in his slow, quiet voice, "He's all right."

"How are the other children?" I asked. "Are they friendly?"

Again he hesitated, this time for an even longer time. "They're . . . You'll see." So much for him. I would soon be at school myself and see everything at last.

When we reached the one-room school the other children were playing in the schoolyard in small groups. I recognized five or six girls and boys from Temple. They were several years older than I was, so I did not walk up to them. All of the other students were children of either the Romanian or Hungarian peasants living in the foothills of the mountains. One peasant girl stuck out her tongue at me when I walked by her. "I wonder why she did that," I thought. "She doesn't even know me." I decided to ignore her. Soon the children began to file into the school and I followed behind, sliding into a wooden bench by a long table near the back of the room. Hopefully, I

would not be noticeable there, and the peasant girl would forget about me.

I looked around the room. Across the entire front was a raised platform and above it, a large wooden cross with a plaster man hanging from it. He looked lifeless and had barely any clothes on. "Why do they have a dead man for us to look at?" I wondered. I glanced at the two side walls and saw other statues of men but they were all dressed in long, flowing robes, the one nearest me in brown. "That's nice," I thought, having decided that brown was my favorite color. In front of me stretched other rows of benches and tables.

As I was counting them, a man in a long, black robe wearing what looked like several necklaces around his neck came out of the side door in the front of the room and strode to the platform. "Silence!" he shouted. I had not been whispering as several of the girls had, but I immediately pressed my lips together so I would not even think of talking. The teacher was very thin and pale, almost sickly-looking. I hoped that he would like me. I would be very quiet.

After he had taken down our names and told us how much money to bring to school for our books, the teacher began the first class of the day, religion. "How many of you remembered to bring your Bibles with you today?" he asked. About half of the children raised their hands. "Good," he continued. "At least not all of you are idiots. We will begin," he continued, "by turning to the first chapter of Corinthians, verses twenty-two and twenty-three. Who will begin?"

He went on with what I came to understand was religion class. The other few Jewish children and I were required to sit through an hour of this class every day, although we did not have to participate.

The day wore on. School was far less exciting than I had thought it would be. The other young children and I were placed in the front row, the ones a year older directly behind us and so on to the back of the room. Then we began our regular lessons of math, history, reading and geography, the teacher moving from one age group to another all day long.

Finally, after I thought the first day would never end, we were excused for the day. I watched the other children file out one by one and then stood up by my table, hoping no one would notice me. When I came outside a group of peasant boys in torn, muddy clothes was waiting at the end of the school yard. "Stinkin' Jew!" they yelled at me. "Dirty, stinkin' Jew!" Then they ran off laughing. I hurried to catch up with Eliezer but he was far ahead of me, and I barely kept him in sight all the way home.

As soon as I entered the house I lifted up the hem of my dress and began to smell it, next sniffing my sleeves. The clean, cool odors of sky and rain were imbedded in the fabric, lingering from the day the dress was washed and dried on the river's shore.

My mother came into the room. "Seren, you're home!" she said. Then she paused, watching me. "What in heaven's name are you doing?"

"Do my clothes smell bad?" I asked.

"How can they smell bad? You just put on a clean dress this morning."

"Some of the peasant children called me a 'stinkin' Jew.'"

"Oh, that," she answered with a wave of her hand. "Don't even listen to it. It's nothing. Here, sit down and have a snack and then off you go to the Hebrew school."

I did as I was told and joined the other seven or eight Jewish children whose fathers worked at the mill. The families had hired a Hebrew teacher

for us, and the mill provided a room. We went there immediately after breakfast to say our morning prayer before going to school in the village. After school we went there again to learn how to read and write in Hebrew and to study the Torah.

During the rest of that year I tried to listen to my mother's advice, but it was difficult. For weeks at a time the same group of large, rowdy peasant boys followed Eliezer and me home, taunting us all the way. I grew to dread even the sight of them. Then one day in spring none of the boys appeared at school. Days and weeks went by and they continued to be absent. I could not believe our good luck. "Where do you think those boys have gone?" I finally asked Eliezer.

"I think they have to work in the fields," he answered. "It's spring planting time."

"Then they'll be gone until next year!" I said.

While this source of torment vanished every spring and sometimes in the fall during harvest time, the rantings of our priest teacher never ceased. We were required to attend school every single day, even on Saturday and Sunday. If we stayed home to celebrate our Sabbath on Saturday we were marked absent and given failing marks in all of our subjects for that day. Often we went to school on Shabat to avoid the teacher's wrath, even though we could do no writing as all work is forbidden on Shabat. If a Jewish holiday like Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippor occurred, the rabbi went to the school to petition for us to be excused for that particular day. I remember seeing the rabbi marching out of the classroom in anger, his robes flapping noisily, while the priest stood firm almost without exception.

On Sundays the other children and I congregated in the school room in

the morning and then went as a group to church. I did not mind the singing and chanting, but I did not like the container which hung on a long, golden chain and held a strongly-scented substance. The priest swung it back and forth as he walked down the aisle to the front of the church, often aiming it in my direction. The odor always gave me a headache.

When the sermon began, the priest would look directly into the eyes of one of the peasant farmers sitting with his wife, she wearing only a very thin, faded, cotton dress even in the middle of winter. "Do you ever wonder why your life is so hard?" the priest would ask. "Do you ever wonder why you never seem to have enough food, why you have to sell all of your grain for very little money and live on corn meal? Why you work from before sunrise until after dark and can still barely maintain your simple, cold huts? Why only one or two of your many children has warm shoes for the winter? I am sure you wonder how God can be so unmindful of you, how He can let you live in such conditions with no hope for the future. Well, let me assure you that God is blameless. He has been bountiful in His blessings. Praise ye the Lord! The blame for your sufferings can all be placed on the killers of Christ, the Jews!"

He pronounced Jews as if the word were a synonym for snake. This is exactly how he made me feel, like a snake, like the serpent in the story of Adam and Eve. I wanted to crawl under the pew and hide there until it was time to go home. I did not want anyone to look at my clean, warm clothing and then compare it to the torn dress of the peasant girl sitting beside me.

Still I could not understand how we had made the peasants poor. My father worked very hard for his salary. He did not go out at night and steal from the peasants. He was in bed by seven o'clock. I had two dresses for

school and one good dress for Shabat. Every payday my mother and father sat down at the kitchen table with a list of clothes that each member of the family needed and compared it to the amount of money available. My mother would say, "What do you think I should buy when we go to Targul-Mures? Eliezer needs a pair of shoes, Esther needs material for a warm coat, Sereń has no stockings and Zipporah has outgrown her Shabat dress."

"We'll get Eliezer's shoes this month," my father would answer, "and perhaps coat fabric for Esther. Zipporah will have to wear her dress for a while longer even if the sleeves are too short. Sereń will get new stockings next month."

I always went away furious after I overheard these discussions. Every morning I had to put on stockings with holes in them. "Someday," I promised myself, "I will earn enough money to buy my own stockings when I need them. I will not wait until the holes are so huge I get blisters!"

I went home as quickly as I could after the Sunday service was over, and tried to enjoy the rest of the day. Mondays at school were especially difficult as the priest's sermons always succeeded in stirring up the peasants against us. However, the peasants could not really be blamed; they were not educated enough to think for themselves.

This vulnerability of the peasants was especially evident during government elections. As verbal attacks by the priests led to harrassment and hostility, so visits to our village by campaigning politicians led first to accusations and then to assaults on the Jewish population. I remember one evening when my brothers Mendel and Meyer came running into the house.

"They've beat up Mr. Mittleman!" Mendel said to my father. "He's badly hurt."

"The poor man! Is he at home?" my father asked.

"Yes, the doctor's with him. He may have both arms broken," answered Meyer.

"I was afraid something like this would happen," my father said. "When I walked near the village this afternoon I saw the peasants all standing in the square listening to a politician up on a platform. He was going on and on about how we Jews are all wealthy. If only we were! And the reason we are alledgedly wealthy is because we have taken everything from the peasants."

"But we have taken nothing from them," Meyer answered. "Their ancestors were slaves! They're not much better off now. They have to borrow money for everything and they are charged as much as 40 percent interest. It's the government that's corrupt! They lie to the peasants, cheat them, promise them that if they vote in the right way they will solve all of their problems for them--namely, get rid of us! What have we to do with any of it?"

"Not a thing. Not a thing," answered my father. "All we can do is stay as much out of their way as possible. The peasants were very likely taken into the tavern after the speeches and all allowed to get drunk at the politician's expense. Stay away from the village until the elections are over. Just hope they leave us alone."

We did not go anywhere for a while, the elections came and went with the same corrupt officials being re-elected, and all that I had to deal with was the usual group of tormentors at school.

During that first year, Eliezer and I simply ignored the gang of boys at first and then managed to elude them when they started to chase us with sticks and rocks. The next year Zipporah started school and then there were three of us--two little girls and one quiet boy. We looked like we did not have a chance.

One day in the late fall when we were on our way home we came to the long bridge spanning the river between the village and our house. Since we had not so much as glimpsed the gang that day, we felt that they had forgotten about us and we were safe. Then we saw them: four rough-looking, rowdy boys standing right in the middle of the bridge, completely blocking our path. For an instant we started to back away. Then, as if each of us had decided at the same moment, we walked out on the bridge directly up to the boys. Quickly we took our book bags off our backs, placed them on the bridge floor and stood with legs far apart and hands up, ready for anything.

The boys looked at us for a moment or two with sneers on their faces. Then one of them said, "Dirty J . . . " Before he could finish the phrase Eliezer slammed the side of the boy's face with his fist. Immediately I began to pummel another boy with my hands. Luckily I had spotted one as small as I was, so I had no difficulty in reaching his ears which I hit as hard as I could. Zipporah had on her good thick boots so she began to kick out with them, hitting one boy in the knees, another in the legs.

"Oh! Stop! Ow! Ow!" the boy I was hitting began to yell. I stopped hitting him just long enough to see my book bag and all my books go sailing over the railing of the bridge and into the fast-moving river below. "My books!" I thought. "Oh, my books!" I decided to worry about them later and started attacking the boy once more, hitting him so hard that my hands stung. In another moment or two the four of them took off at a fast run and rapidly disappeared down a path at the other end of the bridge. We could not believe it. We had won!

When we arrived home, one look at our disheveled clothes and bloody faces was more than enough evidence to give us away. My mother quickly

shepherded us to the basin to wash off the blood and dirt, but my father said very little. Yet I could tell that he was secretly pleased that we had successfully defended ourselves. When I asked him the next morning for money to replace the books I had lost in the river he gave it to me without any hesitation, even though it was all the money he had in his pocket.

However, when I tried to give the money to the teacher the next morning he looked at me with narrowed eyes and said, "You may not buy books during the school year, only at the beginning of the term. Perhaps that will teach you to be more careful!" The rest of the whole year I went without books. However, that group of boys never bothered us again.

CHAPTER THREE

The spring of my tenth year, the last one our family spent at the mill near the little village of Fűlehäza, was ushered in by a swelling, raging river. As Passover was near, our house was filled with all the married children and their families who had come to celebrate the holiday with us: Herman and Tamara and their sons Miksa and Ernie; Louise and Bela; Mendel and his wife, Adel; Rose and Eugene and their baby daughter, Emma. On the second morning of the Seder we looked out and found that our house had become an island. During the night the river had spilled over its banks, spilled over the road from the mill to the village and was now lapping at the ground around our home. A week of warm weather followed by heavy rains had washed the melting snow down out of the mountains in a rush.

We ran from window to window, looking out at the gray, muddy water. Zipporah and I stood at the front windows staring at the trees protruding from the water, fallen twigs and leaves swirling around their trunks. Suddenly our geese swam by.

"Look!" I said. "They love it! Don't you wish you were a goose now? I do!"

"You are a goose!" she said, running from the window.

"You're an old cow!" I yelled, but she was already in the next room and pretended not to hear me.

Then Esther, four years old at the time and the adored baby of the family with her long blonde curls, came running up to me. "Come and see!" she said. "Houses are on the river."

We ran to the back of the house, to my mother and father's room facing the river. My older half-sisters were all around the back window, crowded together.

"Look at that hut over there!" said Berta. "A man and a woman are sitting on the roof! I hope they don't fall in." I tried squeezing into one place first and then another, but no one would let me see.

"There's a chicken house going by!" said Rose. "The chickens are still in it!"

"Oh, I see it!" said Tamara. "Can't you imagine the eggs rolling around all over inside."

I tried jumping like Esther; our two heads bobbed up and down, up and down, behind our tall sisters.

"Do you see that?" Louise asked then in an incredulous tone. That did it. I took Esther by the hand, we got on our hands and knees and soon wiggled our way to the window. Getting up on our knees slowly so no one would notice us, we drew away the lower curtains and looked at last. I could not believe it was the same, peaceful Mures that we sat beside on warm evenings watching for loggers' lights. All across the muddy plain of water were whole households being swept quickly downstream.

As soon as one little hut with several people on its roof went by, it was followed by a barn turned on its side and then a shed bobbing up and down in the current. In between all of the huts and coops and barns, the horses and cows desperately swimming along, were enormous chunks of ice broken loose from the glacier fields high up in the mountains. I stared at it for a long time, hypnotized by the constant, rapid flowing. One morning you woke up and the quiet, peaceful life you knew had changed overnight.

pleasant as the one we were leaving by the river I so loved?

As soon as we arrived at the village I knew that although I would miss Fűlehäza, I would like living in Lunca de Mijloc very much. It was a bigger village, lying in a broad plain between two mountain ranges. We had piled all of our belongings onto a train, climbed aboard and ridden to the new village. When we arrived at our house we began walking behind my father around the huge yard. He pointed to all the apple and pear trees, to the wide garden plot, to the nearby houses. As the mill was on the edge of the village, we were going to live in town and I would not have to walk a long way to school.

The first day that Eliezer, Zipporah and I all went to our new school I was surprised at how the teacher welcomed us. Unlike our former teacher, the old, dour priest, this teacher was young and smiled at us. "Could this be our regular teacher?" I wondered. "He is probably only here for the day," I decided, "and the real teacher will be back tomorrow." The next day, however, the young man was there again and every day after that. His kindness and enthusiasm seemed to affect the children as well, for no one tormented us. After school one day several girls came up to me. One asked me my name.

"My name is Sereń Tuvel," I said. "What is yours?"

"Annie Lietze," she answered. "Where do you live?"

"At the edge of the village near the mill. My father is the manager there. He's an expert!"

"That's a Jew mill," she said. "Isn't it?"

I looked down at my brown leather shoes and began to hollow out a depression in the dust with one foot.

"Isn't it?" she repeated.

"Yes," I answered, looking up at her.

"You couldn't be a Jew," Annie continued. "You have blonde hair and blue eyes. You don't look a bit like the dirty Jews. Anyway, Tuvel isn't a Jew name. Say you're not a dirty Jew and I'll be your friend."

I looked at her for a few minutes. She was pretty and always surrounded by a number of friends. I would have liked to have been included in her group.

"Say you're not a Jew!" Annie repeated.

I turned away.

"Come on," she said to her friends. "Who needs a stinkin' Jew?"

They walked to the other end of the schoolyard, calling back again and again, "Dirty Jew . . . Dirty Jew . . . Dirty Jew. . . . "

Since I still had no friends I studied harder, finding school with this new teacher both exciting and interesting. I finished the third grade with high marks and continued to do well in the fourth grade as we studied such difficult subjects as algebra and German. Romanian history was equally hard; there were hundreds of little kings who fought many big wars and we had to know which king went with which war. We also studied the geography and history of every other nation in the world, especially the United States which was portrayed as a wonderful land. I learned about the Mississippi River and all the smaller rivers, about the huge cities and the towns, about how the people worked hard to make it a good country, but I also read Uncle Tom's Cabin and cried over it. The United States sounded like a place one might wish to visit. As for me, I would be happy to live in Transylvania forever.

Especially exciting about that year was the contest in the spring. Each year every school in Transylvania was required to send the fourth grader with the best grades to the province capital, Targul-Mures, for a chance to

win a scholarship to the Gymnasium. I was immensely interested in this contest, for at the end of the fourth grade every student had to decide between advancing to the Gymnasium in the city or staying in the village school for three more years. If you wanted a basic education, you remained in the village school to obtain the equivalent of a high school degree; our schools were very difficult and one could learn there in seven years what a child learns today in twelve. If you wanted to obtain a college education, however, you left home at the end of the fourth grade and attended the Gymnasium in Targul-Mures. No one in our family had ever attended the Gymnasium. My older brothers were very content to complete the seven grades and then work in a mill like our father or in some other business. My older sisters thought only of marriage and children. Perhaps Berta would have entered a scholarly profession had she lived in another time, but she did not.

I had decided at the beginning of the year that I wanted to attend the Gymnasium more than anything. I loved learning, having taught myself to read years ago during all those quiet afternoons up in the hayloft in Fúleháza. With the sun streaming through a crack in the barn roof, I had looked up from my books into the golden, fragrant light and thought, "I will learn as much as I can. I will be somebody!"

I knew now that my father thought girls did not need more of an education than the village school had to offer. "Well," I decided, "if I do obtain the scholarship perhaps he will change his mind after all and let me go to the Gymnasium. I'll worry about that later."

Finally the day came when the teacher, Mr. Tepes, was to announce who had the best grades and was eligible for the contest. I ran to school that morning as fast as I could. When I came into the school it seemed that Mr.

Tepes smiled especially at me. "Perhaps he's feeling sorry for me," I thought, "and that's why he's being friendly." Then I looked around the room. No, he was not smiling at anyone else. After he had rung the bell for order, Mr. Tepes said, "I have decided who will enter the contest at Targul-Mures. Sereń," he said, looking at me, "no other student's grades even came close to yours. You will go." My heart almost jumped out of my chest. "See me after classes, Sereń," he continued, and then we began our lessons.

Slowly the rest of the school day passed and then Mr. Tepes and I sat down together after the other children had gone home. He explained to me how this was only his second year of teaching and how he wanted his students to excel. By choosing me he felt that our school would have a very good chance of obtaining the honor of one of its students winning the scholarship.

"Now, we will hope for two things," he continued. "One, you will try as hard in the contest as you do here in school. And two, you will look so much like a little Romanian girl with your blonde hair and blue eyes, especially since you will be wearing the national costume, that no one will even think to ask you about your nationality. You see, the scholarship has never been given to a Jewish student." He paused, smiling at me. "I know you'll do well."

I went home on wings! I could not wait to tell my mother. She became very excited when I explained everything about the contest and began immediately to wash and press the costume. My father, like always, was more reserved. His attitude was: let her go through with this foolishness and when it is over and she has not won, she will forget about the business of going away to school.

On the day of the contest Mr. Tepes and his wife came to our house

very early in the morning to take me to Targul-Mures. My mother had risen before dawn to fix me a hot breakfast, but I could not eat. I was not worried about the contest; I was fairly certain that I would do well. Still, it was an important day and I wanted to make sure that I was as prepared as possible.

"Let me take a look at you," my mother said as I came back into the kitchen after excusing myself from the table. I twirled for her with a little flourish, the short, embroidered black aprons in the front and back of my skirt whirling out around me. The bright blue and red flowers embroidered all along the neck and sleeves of my white blouse were my favorite part of the outfit. On every national holiday I wore this costume and marched in a parade with the other school children. I loved to dress up for these occasions and felt honored that I could wear my costume today while the other children could not.

"Ah . . . " my mother said with a smile after I had stopped twirling. "You look wonderful!" Then she kissed me goodbye and I went out to the front porch where Mr. Tepes and his wife were waiting for me. We walked to the train station and boarded the train, setting out for the city at last.

The contest lasted for three days and consisted of written examinations in math, Romanian history, world geography, religion, reading and the language one had studied, either French or German. I worked through all of the algebra problems first as quickly as I could, checked my answers and then sat back to look around the room. The other contestants, mostly peasant boys, were still working, heads down, pencils scribbling furiously, eyes squinting. I wondered how they had learned anything when they missed so much school during planting and harvest times.

At the end of the first day one of the examiners told each of us in

which home we would spend the night. When he read my name and the name of the local family with whom I would stay, Mr. Tepes ran up to me and whispered, "No, you will stay here with my wife. I'm afraid you will forget and let slip that you're Jewish." I nodded yes, even though I did not see where we would sleep.

That night we stretched out on the hard benches. My teacher's wife did not seem very comfortable, but she amused herself in the morning by arranging my long hair first one way and then another. She was our embroidery teacher in school and had often combed my hair when the lesson was completed. Blonde, wavy hair was uncommon in our area, so I often attracted attention.

One day followed another, the contest ended and we were told that the winner would be notified as soon as all the tests were scored. There was nothing to do but return home and wait. Every day for the next week I ran to school and asked Mr. Tepes before the first class. "Did you find out who won the contest?" and every day he answered, "No, but I'll tell you as soon as I do." Another week went by but I did not ask every day, only every other day. Finally, I decided that I had not won and so I would forget about the contest altogether.

Then one day, after we had settled into our seats by the tables and were waiting for religion class to begin, the teacher said, "I have just received word about the winner of the fourth grade contest held last month."

I looked up. "One of the peasant boys must have won it after all," I thought.

"The winner is very lucky," he continued. "She will be able to attend the Gymnasium with paid tuition and board."

"So it is a girl!" I thought. I could remember only two other girls

at the contest and wondered which one was the winner.

"She has brought a great deal of honor to our school," the teacher said. "The winner is none other than our very own Sereń!"

The class started clapping for me while I sat there with cheeks blazing. Could it be possible? Could I actually have won? Would I be able to advance in school and learn as much as there was to know? "Yes, I will!" I decided. "Surely my father will be as happy for me as Mr. Tepes."

As soon as I arrived home I ran to my mother in the garden and told her the good news. While she was still hugging me, I asked, "Will Father let me go? I want to so much!"

"Well, why don't you wait to ask him after he has had supper and is in a good mood," she answered. "He always feels better with his stomach full."

All throughout supper that night I picked at my food, waiting for the meal to end. Finally my father put down his knife and fork and sat quietly with his hands folded and resting on the table. I looked at my mother. She nodded, yes. It was time.

"Father," I began softly.

"Speak up!" he answered. "What is it?"

"I won the contest at Targul-Mures. I have been given a full scholarship to the Gymnasium."

"What?" he exploded, his fist coming down on the table. "You are not going to take it! Going to the city for a contest is one thing. Leaving home to live in Bucharest is another. You will not go!"

My heart sank. So it had all been for nothing after all. Then my mother said quietly, "It's a great opportunity for Sereń. She's a very intelligent child and has always done well in school."

"Then she already knows everything she needs to know!" he shouted. "If she's so smart she should quit school altogether. An education is wasted on a girl. Let a boy take her place. She can stay home and learn what she really needs to know--how to make a decent meal. I'm sure that's something she doesn't know, does she?"

"She'll learn those things in time," my mother answered, even though she knew that while I loved to eat I could not even make tea. I was so much of a nuisance in the kitchen with my constant nibbling that my mother always chased me out in exasperation.

"Even if she did go, how would she eat?" my father continued. "There won't be any kosher food. If we had another name besides Tuvel they would have known that she's Jewish and they wouldn't have given her the scholarship in the first place. I suppose they can't take it back now, even when they find out that she's not a Gentile. But they certainly will not see to it that she's given kosher food. No, she can't go. I will not discuss it again!"

I returned to the village school, utterly discouraged. During the few remaining weeks of that year and all during the next fall I tried to put my heart back into my studies, but I could not. Every day in our classes we went over material that I had taught myself months ago, having read every book I could find. Finally, as the year drew to a close, I decided that there was simply nothing more that this school could teach me and that I deserved to attend the Gymnasium. I had won the scholarship. I would go.

My announcement of this decision was met with great anger by my father, but it was only what I expected. He told me that not only would I be defiling my body by eating the non-kosher food at the school but I would be very disappointed if, by some miracle, I did manage to graduate from the Gymnasium.

The scholarship was for training to become a teacher. As teachers were state employees, they could be sent where ever the government chose. The standard practice for the few Jewish students who did graduate from the teaching program was to send them to the most remote village schools that could be found. "Who knows what happens to them!" my father said repeatedly. While I did not know, I was prepared to consider what I would do with my education later. Now I knew that I simply had to learn, to become as educated as possible, even if it meant leaving my mother and incurring the wrath of my father.

In the late fall of 1931 when I was thirteen years old, I walked alone to the train station one morning. I had said goodbye to my mother at the house where she was still busy preparing breakfast for my father. "Come home as often as you can," she told me over and over.

"I will," I promised her.

"If she does you can talk to her," my father said from his place at the table. "I will have nothing more to do with her!"

When I arrived at the Gymnasium it appeared to be all that I had hoped it would be. A large building with separate rooms for each class and different teachers for each subject made up the school with both girls and boys dormitories nearby. I was given a clean room to myself and told when meals would be served in the cafeteria. I knew I would not starve. Hopefully all would go well, and I would excel in my studies.

As soon as classes began the next day I received the first disappointment: I was the sole Jewish girl in the entire school. The one other Jewish student was a boy who did not even acknowledge my presence. I would probably have no friends. At first I thought that perhaps my father was right, that I was wrong to want an education when no other Jewish girls seemed to feel the

same as I. Then I decided that since I was here I would make the best of it, friends or not.

My second disappointment came during religion class. For the other classes we had regular teachers like Mr. Tepes, but for religion class an elderly priest, similar to the one we had had for a teacher in Fúleháza, came to the Gymnasium. Every day he somehow worked into the lesson the idea that all Jews were thieves and murderers and the great misfortune of the Gentile world. Often he pointed to a passage in the Bible and said, "Now this is when the Jews killed Jesus!" He knew that the one boy and I were Jewish, but he did not change his lectures because of us; he would have said the same things had we not been there. I sat there in the front row listening to him week after week, wondering how much longer I could endure it.

One day, two months after I had entered the Gymnasium, the priest began religion class by saying, "I want all of you to be very careful tonight! Passover begins tomorrow and we all know that the evil Jews use Gentile blood to make their matzos. Whatever you do, do not go near any Jews tonight. They will kill you!"

I stood up, grabbed the ink well from my desk and flung it at the priest. It thudded against the board, ink splattering all across it and onto the priest's robe in long, black splashes. Then I turned, walked out of the olassroom and out of the school.

CHAPTER FOUR

As soon as I was outside, I knew that I would never return to the school. I went back to the dormitory, gathered my clothes together, hurriedly threw them into a suitcase and walked to the center of Bucharest. Going back home never entered my mind; there was nothing for me in Lunca de Mijloc. The village school had no more to offer me, and I could not bear the thought of drinking tea and embroidering linens while waiting for the perfect young man to come along and ask me to marry him. I did not even have a dowry. My father was getting old, making only enough income at the mill to survive, and could not set aside money for Zipporah, Esther and me as he had done for our half-sisters. Yet I was exhilerated. I was in the capital city of Romania, "Little Paris," a large city with wide, cobbled streets set in the middle of a lake-studded plain, and I was on my own.

Since I had always loved to make things out of cloth, the idea of becoming a dressmaker's apprentice took form in my mind as I began walking down the central streets. Not quite sure of the location of the dressmaking salons, I wandered first up the street of the capmakers, Sepcari, and then down Blanari, the street of the furriers. Looking into the windows I could see the well-dressed customers who frequented them talking animatedly with the owners. I had heard my older sisters talk about how fashionable Bucharest was and now I was actually seeing for myself elegant ladies ordering their winter coats, their black limosines waiting at the curbs.

Turning the corner and coming onto Strada Domneascu I saw what must be

one of the largest salons in the city. As it was the middle of the day, apprentices were streaming out the doors, the girls all looking to be about thirteen or fourteen years old. They were probably hurrying to their homes in the city for the noon meal. I counted ten of them and knew I had come to the right salon--one large enough to take on another apprentice. While the young men in the cities were all expected to continue their education, most of the young women engaged themselves as apprentices in one trade or another. In the small villages like mine this was not so, as working was considered unsuitable for young ladies. None of my older sisters had left home to work nor had I heard of any other girl from my village doing so. "I will be the first!" I decided, and walked into the salon.

The owner, a tall, large-framed woman who towered over me, must have spotted me immediately for who I was, a naive and foolish young girl, for she walked up to me and asked, "Have you come to engage yourself as an apprentice in my salon?"

"Yes, if you can use me," I said with a catch in my voice that surprised me.

"Have you run away from home?" she asked then, looking at the suitcase sitting on the floor beside me.

"No," I answered. "My parents know that I'm here." I did not tell her about leaving the school. "I'm from the village of Lunca de Mijloc."

"How hard can you work?" she asked.

"Very hard," I answered. "I have been sewing since I was four."

"Well, an apprentice does not even pick up a needle during the first year!" she said. "If I take you on, you will receive room and board with me in exchange for whatever work I need done around the shop or upstairs where

I live. This will include sweeping and scrubbing the floors, delivering garments throughout the city, waiting on the seamstresses, running errands and any other jobs I might need done. During the second year you will begin to work on the garments. At the end of that year, if you pass the examination, you will acquire a license. Only at that point will you start receiving pay. Are you willing to do this? I can only use good workers."

"Yes," I answered quickly before I could change my mind.

"Fine. I want you to sign an apprenticeship contract. This is recognized by the government and is an official document. Do not commit yourself if you are not positive you can last two years."

"I am sure," I said and signed the contract carefully.

"Come upstairs," she said. "I'll show you the room you will have. There is one other girl who is from a village and lives above the shop with me. Then we'll have something to eat, come back down and get to work."

The rest of the day passed quickly. The other new apprentices and I all worked in the back room with the beginning seamstresses. They, of course, enjoyed telling us what to do as they had only recently graduated from being first-year apprentices themselves. I spent most of the afternoon sweeping the floor, but I did not mind. Bits and pieces of colored fabrics--blue silks, soft, gray flannels, bright plaids--lightly littered the floor and I kept thinking, "In a year I will be allowed to work with these fine materials, too!"

I came to enjoy working at the salon very much. The other girls were friendly and while our employer, the owner, was demanding, she was a good business woman and as fair as any other salon owner. We had no fixed hours. If it was a busy time of year, as in the beginning of spring when all of the

to go home, of course, as all my older sisters and brothers brought their families and visited all summer long. My mother and father still believed that I was at the Gymnasium, as I had not written them otherwise. I would visit them as if I were on summer vacation like all the other students.

When I arrived home after the long trip Miksa and Ernie, Herman's sons, ran up to meet me as I climbed down from the train. As we walked home they chattered about Meyer who was bringing home his fiance from Targul-Mures. "Mama says she is very poor," Miksa said. "Will she wear ragged dresses with holes in them?" he asked.

"Then they'll be holy dresses," said Ernie and the two broke into a fit of giggles. "It's wonderful being home," I thought.

I quickly fell into the daily joys of working in the garden beside my mother, picking tomatoes and beans and peas, and listening in the kitchen to the babble of Herman and Tamara, Louise and Bela, Eugene and Rose, and Berta and Morris all trying to talk at once while the children ran in and out among them. Each one asked me about my studies in the manner of all relatives. "How's school?" Eugene might ask, noticing me sitting nearby.

"Fine," I would answer.

"Are you learning anything?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's good!"

When the next relative came home we went through the same routine. Otherwise school was forgotten. My father normally would have asked to see my report card, but since I had disobeyed him by leaving home he did not ask and showed no interest in me whatsoever. I wanted to tell him about my apprenticeship, about all the lovely clothes I had been able to buy, about how I would

soon be able to support myself and not have to burden him in his old age, but I could not. I had left my new things in my room in Bucharest so they could not give me away.

In the middle of July, Meyer's fiance finally materialized. Her name was Lottie and she did not come in torn, faded dresses but in clean, stylish blouses and skirts. As it was the raspberry season, we decided to go up on the mountain to pick the red, juicy berries, inviting Lottie along but not telling her exactly where we were going. "Come along berry-picking," Tamara called from the yard.

"Yes, come," said Rose.

"Thank you, I will," Lottie answered and came, just as she was in a full silk skirt, linen blouse and high-heeled shoes. She must have noticed that we were all in rough cotton skirts and laced-up hiking shoes, but perhaps she thought this is how we always dressed in the country. I knew the trick that was being played on her, letting her go along like a ninny in her fine clothes since she was a refined city girl and ignorant of village life, but I did not say anything.

Up we went, higher and higher, filling our baskets with raspberries and laughing and talking in the clear, bright sunshine. Lottie stayed with the women, lagging behind a little, but seeming to enjoy the activity, despite being snared by the brambles every time she moved. When it was time to go down the mountain we jumped from rock to hillock, scrambling one after the other, until we reached the bottom. Then Meyer said, "Where's Lottie?" We looked around but she was nowhere. Finally someone saw her up at the top of the trail, teetering back and forth.

being measured for a new dress. My favorite ones were those from the court of King Carol II, the son of King Ferdinard. Carol II had been next in line after Ferdinard, but he had fallen in love with a half-Jewish woman, Madame Lupescu, and renounced the throne to be with her several years ago. Carol II's son had taken his place. Last year, however,Carol II had returned, deposed his son with the support of the National Peasant Party and proclaimed himself king.

We were called to the palace for a fitting quite frequently. Perhaps Queen Mother Mary needed an elegant dress for an elaborate state dinner or Elizabeth, the King's sister, desired a new gown for a ball. Then the owner of the shop would gather up the latest designs from Paris as well as boxes of silks, laces and ribbons, and she and I would go to the royal palace. It was my job to carry the boxes.

On arrival at the palace we were ushered into a room reserved for sewing. There I laid out all the fabrics in glossy piles on the floor and hung up the sample dresses and gowns. Mary and Elizabeth would each choose a style, then the fabric from which it would be made and finally climb up on stools to be measured and pinned. I was also in charge of the pins, making sure they were plentiful and nearby when needed. Then we went back to the salon, the royal family satisfied that no other women would appear at a state function with dresses as lovely as theirs. The salon followed a strict code of fashion: each gown must be unique. Every customer was thus assured the attention which was given to her simply because she wore a gown different from all the other new gowns.

The fall and winter went by peacefully and quickly, and soon my first year of apprenticeship was at an end. The other girls and I began sewing under the watchful eyes of the licensed seamstresses. At first we were not given the

"Are you laughing at me?" my mother asked.

"No, no," I said. "I was thinking of the stiff corsets some women must wear."

"Well, I am small, thank goodness," said my mother. "How could I wear such a girdle and still do my cooking and cleaning?"

As soon as I returned to school I began sewing on our dresses in the evenings. I began with my mother's dress, as I wanted to give it to her when I returned home in June. Everything went well until I started the sleeves. They were pleated at the top, and I simply could not make the pleats correctly. I tried again and again, pushing the sleeves higher each time, until finally they fit into the armholes. When I had sewed them in, I realized that the change in the sleeves had made the shoulders much smaller than they should have been--only several inches across in all. "Perhaps it will be all right," I thought, and quickly finished the dress and my own as well.

The other apprentices and I finished our spring orders, business waned once again and I was free. I had the summer all planned: I would stay with my parents for a month and then visit Meyer and Lottie who had married during the past year and were living in Galati.

As soon as I arrived home I unpacked my suitcase and showed the matching dresses to my mother. She was very pleased and decided to try on hers immediately, even though she was in the middle of making challot for Shabat. As soon as she came back into the kitchen I saw how badly the shoulders fit. "The dress is a complete failure," I thought. "How foolish of me to think I could sew!"

"It's beautiful!" my mother said, turning around in a little twirl. "I love the checks. Oh, but I've dusted flour all over the skirt." She began

the time so delerious that I could not eat. Once I remember waking up with a drenching sweat and thinking, "I am still sick! Will I never get well?"

The doctor decided that perhaps a change in climate would help me. Lottie and Meyer accompanied me to the city where Berta and Morris lived, Brasov, located in the middle of a warm and mild resort area. Here I began to improve almost immediately, largely because I enjoyed being with my favorite older sister and her husband. Every day at noon Morris came home from his job as supervisor in a woolen mill for the typical, European two-hour lunch. He was always cheerful and entirely devoted to Berta, cleaning house in the evenings after she had spent the day gossiping with her neighbors, cooking dinner every Sunday, shopping while she entertained at an afternoon tea. He adored her.

Berta, in turn, did not love Morris as far as I could tell. However, she humored him by agreeing to play cards every day after lunch. When I became stronger and healthier, I was allowed to stay at the table with them instead of climbing back into bed. As I watched them play I came to realize what a good man Morris was. As long as Berta was winning she wanted to keep playing. "Oh, because I am winning you want to stop?" she would say, even though it might be past time for Morris to return to work. He would laugh and continue to play another hand or two. As soon as Berta began to lose, she scooped up the cards and said, "It's time to stop, Morris. You'll be late for work!" Then Morris and I looked at each other, he smiled his wide, mischievous smile, and I burst into laughter. This happened every single day like a ritual in the ceremonies of their marriage. I often thought, "Ah, Berta, if you only knew how lucky you are! Morris loves you with all of his heart." After a month at their home I was completely recovered and able to return to the salon at Bucharest.

In the spring of 1933, immediately after my fifteenth birthday, I finished my two-year apprenticeship, passed an examination and became a licensed dressmaker. At last I began to receive a regular salary and could move out of my employer's house and into a room of my own. I found one with a pleasant Gentile family but I did not stay there a great deal, only in the early mornings before work and in the evenings. At the salon I made a number of friends and these girls invited me into their homes on the weekends.

It was awesome to have such freedom, to come and go as I liked, to be able to buy things with my salary. I began to think of what presents I would like to bring home to my parents and decided on a lace shawl for my mother and a silk, blue tie for my father. While I had told my mother about working in the salon after I made the dress for her, my father still thought I was enrolled at the Gymnasium. Now that I was making a salary and living by myself I felt it was time to tell him as well. I would give him the tie and say, "Father, I bought this for you with money I earned myself!" Hopefully, the gift would detract from the disgrace of having a daughter of his leave home to work rather than to marry.

The plan failed completely. When I made my little speech and gave my father the gift he opened it, glanced at the tie folded neatly in the tissue paper and set the box down again without saying a word. He did not even raise his eyes to mine. Then he went outside, slamming the door behind him. The box was left lying on the table like a foolish trifle.

A week later my father came into the yard to see if we were ready to leave on a trip to visit Herman and Tamara. He was wearing the tie. The rich, blue fabric against his white shirt brought out the color of his eyes, deep like a summer sky. "You look very handsome today," my mother said, brushing

a speck of lint from his shoulder. He said nothing, as always when anyone complimented him, but he looked quickly at me to see if I had noticed. I looked back, smiling. After that he wore the tie often.

The following year my parents moved again to what would be our last home. It was here that my father was arrested, here where my mother was forced to abandon everything forever. Perhaps it would have been easier to leave a place not so beautiful, not so green and lush that sometimes, when I lay down among the tall grasses beside the spring and watched the clouds drift like transparent shadows across the tree-lined ridge, I thought that the Garden of Eden could not have been more fair.

The village was Valea Uzului, the valley of the Uz, spread along the banks of a river so wide and clear that one could see all the smooth stones at the bottom of the riverbed. High up in the Carpathian Mountains above the village, twenty-four kilometers high, a wealthy Jewish baron had found an old hunting castle still standing from the times when feudal lords controlled all of the land. This baron had formerly lived in Germany but fled in 1930 when it was becoming apparent that anti-Semitism was increasing. He built a lumber mill high up on the mountain above the village, converted the castle into a home and created a paradise for himself. At that time he felt somewhat secure, as did most of the Jewish population who did not believe that what was happening far away in Germany could ever affect them in Romania. While I saw the new Iron Guard party begin to march through the streets of Bucharest, the people in the village were remote from these men, seemingly safe.

This baron, having heard how knowledgeable my father was about the lumbering business, offered him a job in 1934 as manager of the mill. My family was overjoyed. The company that owned the mill at Lunca de Mijloc and

most of the other mills in Transylvania was closing them down one by one, still suffering from the effects of the depression, and my father's job could be lost at any time. This new mill was very modern and large, employing around fifteen hundred men, but it had very few families. Most of its employees were single men who worked at the mill for two or three years, saved their money and then went back to their homes.

My mother had written me about their new home, and I could not wait to visit it. Her letter described all of the new modern equipment at the mill--huge, electric saws that whirred all day long. "We have not told anyone here that you are working as a dressmaker," she also wrote. "Could you please your father in this one thing and not tell anyone? Your job is a great source of embarrassment to him. I know that he is very old-fashioned about women working, but this is the way he is. He feels it is his responsibility to provide for his family."

"Ah, Father," I thought. "I will not betray you."

As soon as summer had arrived once again I took the train north from Bucharest and then west to Valea Uzului on the far western edge of the Carpathians. Once at the village I changed trains, boarding a small lumber train that ran from the village up to the mill and back again. The steam engine slowly chugged up the steep grade, curving round the slender pines gracing the mountain side and reaching up high above us. After several miles we came into a clearing and there was the castle, towering above the forests exactly like one in a fairy tale, exquisite gardens of flowers and shrubs growing all around it. Rounding a curve we came upon another delight--a tiny, wooden hunting chapel almost hidden beneath the trees. I knew I would come back to see everything again and again and I did, especially the chapel.

All along the inside walls were the most beautiful paintings I have ever seen. Their brilliant colors glowed when I sat staring at them on quiet afternoons, the sun filtering through the narrow windows in long shafts. If I ever have the courage to go back to Romania, it is that chapel that I would most like to see--the deep ruby reds, the cobalt blues, the light streaming through the stillness.

CHAPTER FIVE

The summer of my sixteenth year was a very joyful time for my family and me. Isolated as we were high up in the mountains above Valea Uzului, we felt very safe; we did not know that far away in Germany a man named Adolf Hitler was very rapidly establishing a dictatorship. With our false sense of security we went about our lives quite peacefully.

Oh, Zipporah and I had our disagreements. She was fourteen by now and had completed the seven years of school. While she was probably very bored with village life, she did not ask to join me in the city. However, every time I came home she asked me endless questions about life in Bucharest. "What's going on there now?" she would say.

"Well, I'm not that interested in what's going on there," I answered this time. "I've been to Paris! It's a much more exciting city."

"To Paris! How did you get there?"

"My employer and I went to visit the salons. They're beautiful! We brought back samples of all the new spring fashions."

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed and I knew that she was imagining all of the showings, the elegant dresses, the excitement. I did not tell her that all I did was follow my employer around like a puppy, carrying all of her packages.

"Did you buy anything?" she asked.

"Of course. I bought an expensive pair of shoes. I'll show them to you but I don't want you to wear them."

"All right! All right!" she answered. "Just let me see them."

"Remember! Leave my things alone! I'm older than you and you have to listen to me."

"We'll see about that," she answered.

"Well, do you want to see them or not?" I asked.

"I said I did, didn't I?"

I brought out the new shoes, unwrapping them carefully and slowly like one would rare jewels. Afterwards I hid them in the closet. Zipporah and I were the same size and I knew she would be tempted to wear the shoes if she could find them. On Saturday nights the mill had dances for its employees, as my father forbade the men to go into town to the tavern; the dances were the only form of entertainment allowed. Zipporah loved to dance and always wanted to look as attractive as possible, from her long, black hair to her feet.

On summer evenings we often danced in the kitchen as well, pushing the table and chairs to one side of the room as soon as my father was safely asleep, and turning up the gramophone as high as we dared. My mother sat to one side, sometimes pulling me into her lap as I walked by and then letting me go after a kiss on the cheek. We danced and danced, the blood pounding in our ears, until we had to stop for breath. Everyone home for a visit--Herman and Tamara, Rose and Eugene, Berta and Morris, Meyer and Lottie and perhaps even Mendel and Adela or Louise and Belá--tangoed and fox trotted and waltzed long into the night. Sometimes we tried to sing along with a popular song, but someone, usually Herman, mixed up all the verses and we broke into laughter midway through the song.

On Saturday nights the gypsy musicians came and we all went to the

hall at the mill for the dance. These were the times that Zipporah made me so angry that I would have traded her then and there for any other sister in the world. While Esther and I got along well together, walking up the slope to the mill hand in hand, Zipporah seemed to try as hard as she could to irritate me.

I remember one particular dance held soon after I had arrived home that summer. As soon as the dishes were washed and put away I had rushed to the room I shared with Zipporah and Esther to dress. I was especially looking forward to wearing my new shoes and a lovely, beige silk blouse that I had also bought in Paris. The blouse and the shoes matched perfectly and would complement my skirt. When I reached to the far corner of the closet shelf where I had hidden both in an old dress box, they were gone. I looked all through the closet, trying to convince myself that perhaps I had hidden them in another place and forgotten, but knowing in my heart that there was really only one explanation: Zipporah had raced to the room after her quick departure from the supper table, found my blouse and shoes and sneaked out the back door to the dance.

Discovering that my brown skirt was also missing, I became furious. How could she have tricked me? I rummaged through her clothes roughly, knocking most of her dresses off the hangers, but found nothing there to please me. Wearing my faithful red dress, I went to the dance with Esther, determined to find Zipporah and tell her exactly what I though of her deceit.

When we arrived I saw her whirling about with one of the men from the mill and wearing my blouse, skirt and shoes, as I had expected. I decided to wait until a pause in the music to confront her.

A young man from the mill whom I had often admired from a distance

asked me to dance. His name was David and he had a wry sense of humor that I found very attractive. We danced well together, finding ourselves still partners after an hour had passed. By now I had completely forgotten my anger with Zipporah and would have dismissed her completely from my mind had she not come up to David and me as we stood talking at an intermission. I tensed immediately, suddenly remembering how attractive men always found Zipporah to be. However, I felt obligated to introduce her to David. She quickly offered him her wide, open smile spreading across her entire face like a gift one could not possibly refuse. While I found her smile very easy to ignore, most men felt singularly blessed by it. Then she tossed her long, black hair over one shoulder and said to him, "Do you like my blouse? It's Sereń's and comes all the way from Paris. She let me wear it. Wasn't that nice?"

"It surely was," answered David. "It's a beautiful blouse and looks very good on you."

"Thank you," she said and smiled again, widely.

The music started and David asked, "Would you like to dance, Zipporah?" They walted away together, she smiling sweetly, he not looking back at me once. Of course, he asked her for the next dance as well and the one after that while I sat alone and thought of a thousand names I would like to call Zipporah. Finally, there was another break in the dances. I followed Zipporah into the outhouse behind the mill.

"Who do you think you are?" I demanded. "First you take my blouse and shoes and then you steal David away from me! I told you to leave my things alone!"

"Since when is David yours?" she asked. "He does not seem to think he is."

"He danced with me until you walked over and tossed your black mane at him."

"Maybe he prefers my black mane to your faded old hair," she said. She had touched upon a very tender subject; I was very proud of my long hair.

"It's not faded!" I answered. "You leave me alone! Leave me alone and my clothes alone and my boyfriends alone!"

She looked at me, smiled that infuriating smile and said, "I will do whatever I like." With that she walked out of the room and into the main hall. She danced with David for the rest of the evening. I told myself that if he was that fickle he was not worth my affection in the first place, but it was a small comfort. Righteousness is often little company.

One particular Saturday night that summer, however, when Zipporah, Esther and I all went to the dance, a young man stayed by my side all evening and promised to serenade me back at our house. The custom was for a young man to accompany a girl home and then return to the hall for the gypsy musicians. Back he would come, the gypsies in tow. While they sang under your window he stood beside them, looking up at you passionately. You, in turn, stayed safely inside, lighting a candle in your window to acknowledge the serenade.

On this evening my dancing partner joined forces with the two young men who had accompanied Esther and Zipporah home and all three of them returned with the musicians. The moon was full and bright as they strolled down the slope from the mill to our house, already singing. Hurriedly we got our candles ready. However, the band of men and musicians did not stop at our window. They continued round the corner of the house to the back.

"Where are they going?" Zipporah asked. "I told them which window was ours!"

"I think they have the front and the back of the house mixed up," I said. Then we looked at each other, Esther covering her open mouth with her hand. We all realized it at the same time: they were going to our father's window by mistake. We ran out of our room and down the stairs, practically falling over our skirts trying to stop them, but it was too late. The musicians had begun to play a wild tarentella. In not more than thirty seconds my father was angrily banging on the window. The music stopped abruptly. Flinging open the window, my father shook his fists at the strange group gathered beneath his window in the middle of the night. I clamped my hand over my mouth to keep from bursting out in laughter at the sight of his white nightshirt brilliant in the moonlight, the clenched fist, the amazed expressions of our bumbling swains. In another instant the gypsies had scattered like the wind and the young men had hurried to the other side of the house.

"Oh, no, oh, no," my young man kept moaning as we later gathered briefly near the front porch. "Your father is so angry. He will surely fire me tomorrow."

"Don't worry about it," I assured him with a little pat on his arm. "Maybe he didn't even see who it was."

"I know he did! I know it! Look at the moon! He must have seen me!" he said.

"My father becomes very angry when he's roused from sleep," I said, "but he gets over it quickly. He's back in bed under the covers and has already forgotten that you were here."

"Oh, if only you are right," he answered as he left for the mill before my father came outside and fired him on the spot. The next morning

the incident was not even mentioned nor were the men fired. My sisters and I decided that my father must have thought he dreamed the entire thing.

The rest of the summer when I was not either dancing, visiting the huge strawberry beds and gardens by the castle or lying in the grass beside the spring, I was nibbling in the kitchen. I enjoyed nothing more when I was home than sticking my spoon into all the pots cooking on the stove and tasting every dish. Finally my mother would get exasperated with me. "First I have to send you to the spring a whole hour before I need the water because I know you will daydream the time away," she would say. "Then you come back and snack on everything I'm preparing for dinner. Just you wait! It will pour on your wedding day."

"Ah, I'm not worried about that!" I always replied. The thought of marriage rarely entered my mind.

"Well, I am!" she answered and swept me out of the kitchen playfully with the end of her broom.

In the fall when I returned to Bucharest, life gave me more of the same kinds of joy. I had by now acquired a large circle of friends including other seamstresses from the salons and young Jewish men and women who lived in the city and worked in other trades. In the evenings after we were finished with our work for the day we met on the streets outside the shops. Every day at six o'clock a long line of young men stood at the entrance to our salon, each waiting for his partner. Often we went as a large group to a nearby restaurant.

On Saturdays our group of friends spent the entire day together, meeting downtown and then attending the theater or literary discussions in the afternoons. In the evenings the popular activity was to dine at a

restaurant with a garden and a dance floor. In warm weather we sat outside by the rushing fountains nestled among the lavender and purple petunias and bright pink geraniums. The music from inside drifted out into the balmy air, mingling with the gushing of the fountains. We added to the noise with our own babbling, quibbling over whether the broiled meats were better at this restaurant or at the one we had been to on the previous Saturday night. My favorite dish was shaped like a hot dog but made out of ground beef and broiled at the end of a prong. I looked forward to Saturday night so I could order it once again. In the colder months we moved inside the restaurants but otherwise it was the same--chattering like a flock of starlings, eating the delicious meals together, dancing with first one partner and then another until the restaurant closed for the night and we reluctantly went out into the streets and back to our homes.

During that fall and winter, life went on in the same carefree manner, but in the early spring of 1935 I began to feel that this way of life was all being threatened, that everything would come crashing down around our heads.

When I left the salon every day at noon I saw the new Iron Guard Party strutting down the middle of the streets as if they owned them. During the fall and winter they had marched only occasionally, but now they were present almost daily, the high black boots stamping on the cobblestones. The men wore dark green shirts and brown trousers, drab and dull as gun metal, but on the sleeve of each arm, raised straight out at a peculiar angle, a band of red caught my eye. It was a brilliant red, blood red, and was marked in the center by a blue, hooked cross turned on its side in the middle of a circle of yellow. The same hooked cross stood out on the rippling flags

carried by some of the marchers. "What does it mean?" I wondered. The years I had spent in the village schools where a cross had served as a backdrop for attacks on the Jews made me feel very uneasy, seeing the blue hooked crosses fluttering by day after day.

The others in my group of friends were beginning to feel equally uncomfortable. During our literary meetings on Saturday afternoons we often forgot completely the book being discussed and began to talk openly about our growing sense of uneasiness. One Saturday in the middle of our discussion, Rivkele, one of the girls, burst into the room. "I barely made it!" she gasped. Her eyes were wide with fear, her lips drawn tightly together. Deep marks stood out on her face--red stripes running from the bridge of her nose to her neck.

"What happened?" one of the group asked.

"I was on my way here," she began. "When I got to Cepcari Street the Iron Guard was marching down it. I was late, so instead of waiting until they were past I ran in front of them. But I ran as fast as I could! I didn't even think they would notice me. When I got to the other side of the street I was suddenly grabbed from behind. A man in a uniform pinned me against the side of the building." Her voice broke and she began to cry, sobbing loudly for a few minutes. We looked back and forth from her to each other, afraid to hear the rest of the story but wanting to hear at the same time.

"He shouted at me, 'Swine! Jew swine! The time is up for filth like you.' The he slapped me across my face and threw me to the ground. When he left he spit on me. He spit on me!" She began to cry again. Several of the other girls went to comfort her, taking her to a couch in the next room where she could lie down.

"It gets worse every day," one of the men said. "I'm almost afraid to get out of bed in the morning."

"But we have always been persecuted," said Ben, another of the men. "Hatred of the Jews is nothing new. The Iron Guard Party is one of many groups that wishes we didn't exist. They're no better or no worse than all the others."

"No, no, I don't think so," said Abram, one of the scholars in our group. "The Iron Guard is receiving financial support from the Nazis in Germany. When religion and fascism combine like they have in this group, it's very dangerous. Do you know what their motto is? 'Jesus, King and Nation.' They could do a great deal of harm to us."

"How can you be so sure?" asked Ben.

"They are spreading all over Romania. I've heard of them marching in other cities. They always bear the same symbol--the swastika."

"Is that what it's called, the blue, hooked cross?" I asked.

"Yes," Abram answered. "It almost looks like their emblems."

"And what are they?" Ben asked.

"The crucifix and the pistol. Now do you believe me?"

"I do," said Edna, one of my girlfriends from the Russian sector of Bucharest. "I've been frightened for some time. My sister and I have applied for passports to emigrate to Palestine."

"To Palestine!" I exclaimed. "I've never known anyone who was actually going there. Is it really a beautiful land of milk and honey?"

"Well, I don't know," she answered. "I do know that we won't live a life of luxury once we're there. If we're lucky enough to receive the passports, we'll be sent to a training center somewhere in Romania for six weeks

where we'll be taught how to farm. Everything is operated by a Zionist organization." She paused, laughing. "Can you imagine me as a farm girl?"

"Why farming?" asked one of the other girls.

"They have the land," Edna answered, "even though Palestine is under the English mandate. The people there don't have much of anything, but they are allowed to farm. They need young people who can make the land produce."

"When do you think you'll go?" I asked.

"As soon as the passports come," she answered. I hope my sister really wants to go. She's been walking around all dreamy-eyed ever since she met this young man named Hiram. You'd think she'd never seen a man before!"

"I think you're being very wise," Abram said. "If my mother wasn't so old I would apply for a passport, too. I can't leave my mother, but I would love to go to Palestine.

As the following weeks went by I thought more and more about Edna and her hopes of going to Palestine. Emigrating seemed the only sensible thing to do. As if conditions were not harsh enough for the Jewish people in Romania, one kept hearing about what was happening in Germany. Ever since Hitler's coming into rule rumors had come drifting like acrid smoke on a winter wind--rumors of endless columns of brownshirted men with the same swastika on their sleeves, of mobs of people cheering them on through the streets, of the flickering lights of thousands of torches at mass rallies. The shouts of "Deutschland erwache! Jude verrecke!" carried out into the cold night air across the fields and forests of Germany, across the plains of Hungary and into the very heart of Romania. What if the words "Germany awake! Jew perish!" came to mean "Europe awake! Jew perish!"

Several months later I found Edna waiting for me after work one evening. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright and sparkling. "They've come!" she said hurriedly. "The passports have come . . . the ones from Palestine. My sister has become engaged and doesn't want to go. Can you imagine? So I want you to come with me. Will you? Please say you'll come!"

I stared at her for a minute or two. "You're asking me to come with you?" I said. "You'll let me have your sister's passport?"

"Yes!" she cried. "Will you come?"

"I'd love to come," I answered. "Yes, I'll come! I'll come!"

"I'm so glad," Edna answered. "It will be wonderful--a whole new life."

That night I went over the entire conversation again in my mind and realized the full implications of my decision. If I left Romania I could never return; those were the conditions of the program set up by the Zionist organization. Since Palestine was under the English mandate very few passports were given. If I took one I would be expected to remain in Palestine forever. I would never again see the Carpathians jutting up into the sky, the clouds moving across them in great white sweeps, never again hear the stream trickling down the slope in the tall, green grasses near our home in Valea Uzului. I would never see my family again. My mother's face flashed into my mind. Could I bear to leave her? Could I go, knowing that I would never see her again?

The following weekend I went home to tell my parents about my opportunity to emigrate. I barely had the words spoken when my father shouted, "No! No! I forbid it."

"But Father, I haven't even explained . . . "

"I said, no!" he interrupted. "It's bad enough that you insist on defying me by working in Bucharest. Now you want to run away to Palestine."

"Could I at least tell you why I want to go?" I asked.

"You can tell me. But I will not change my mind!"

I thought about all the things I could tell him--the daily marches by the Iron Guard, the Jewish shops I had seen with the word "Jew" smeared across them in red paint one week and a week later boarded up and closed, confiscated by non-Jewish people, the increasing fear that my friends and I felt as we walked through the city. However, I was afraid that he would say that life was always more violent in the city and this was my punishment for leaving home. Instead, I began relating what I had heard about Germany from a friend who had recently returned from there.

"It's become almost unbearable for the Jewish people in Germany," I said. "Many of them are leaving the country as fast as they can. A man by the name of Hitler has been declared Fuhrer. He could be very dangerous for all Jewish people."

"In Germany?" scoffed my father. "What does that have to do with us?"

"Little by little Hitler has taken away almost everything from the Jews living there. They can no longer work as teachers, doctors, lawyers or even artists--even if they have only one Jewish grandparent and are otherwise of Gentile blood. He's even passed a law stating that no German citizen can marry anyone with the slightest trace of Jewish blood. He thinks us to be less than human. 'Vermin' he calls us, 'Spoilers of the race.' Jews are segregated from Gentiles on buses, on trains, forbidden on the streets after sunset. Signs are appearing everywhere saying, 'Jews not wanted here.' A friend of mine was visiting there and couldn't find a restaurant or hotel

that would allow him inside. He was humilated! He came back home with a few days."

"Well, that should teach him to stay home," my father answered. "But why be concerned about what is happening so far away? Surely someone will come to the aid of the Jews there. You don't have to worry about it."

"No one has come to help them so far. No one does a thing. Hitler can do whatever he likes and he is never even questioned about it. Who has ever come to the aid of the Jews? No one will save us. We must save ourselves. That is why I want to go to Palestine now that I have the chance."

"You're too anxious. We're still safe here in Romania. This isn't Germany."

"But the same things are beginning to happen in Bucharest," I said. "Last week a young man I know named Levi was going home from his job in a woolen mill. He was doing absolutely nothing wrong, simply sitting quietly on the bus. A man wearing the uniform of the Iron Guard asked to see Levi's identification papers. When he saw the word 'Jew' on Levi's papers, he grabbed Levi and shouted, 'Don't you know that a rotten Jew never sits when there are Gentiles standing? No filthy Jew rides on this bus!' When the bus stopped at the corner Levi was pulled off and thrown onto the sidewalk. Several uniformed men kicked him until he lost consciousness. Luckily someone who knew him saw him there in a spreading pool of blood and took him home. Levi is still very ill. He bleeds and bleeds. The doctor cannot stop the bleeding."

"Well, he's to be pitied," said my father. "But Jews have always been beaten. Remember the times the politicians came to our village of Fúleháza and stirred up the peasants? Those meetings always provoked an attack on one

Jewish man or another. Arbitrary persecution is nothing new. I still see no reason why you should run off to Palestine. I've heard enough. You will not go! Do not mention the subject again!"

I looked at my mother. She was sitting in her chair by the table pretending to be busy with some needlework, her fingers lifelessly moving up and down. She had said very little to me ever since I burst into the kitchen with my announcement of the passport. Now she must have felt my gaze upon her for she suddenly looked up, her eyes meeting mine. Liquid and shiny, they blinked rapidly five or six times, stopped and then blinked again. She did not allow herself to cry, but the battle was over. I had lost. I could ignore my father this time, as I had when I left home for the Gymnasium. I could not, however, deny the pain in my mother's eyes. Giving up my hopes for a new, free life in Palestine, I returned to Bucharest once more.

As riding on the trains was quite inexpensive, we would board any train leaving the city and ride until we arrived at a town or village that looked interesting. In Transylvania most of the cities have stations with lattice arcades and vines trailing down gracefully to the sidewalks, forming an archway of greenery. When we saw one of these that was particularly thick and lush we looked at each other. One of us would ask, "Here?" and the other answer , "Yes!" Quickly we would jump off the train and stroll beneath the vines, arm in arm. In the evening we found a hostel for the night and perhaps the next night, too--if we found the village to be pleasant. If not, we boarded the train in the morning and set forth again, willing to go wherever the train took us.

We traveled like this for weeks at a time, sometimes living on nothing but plums, bread and cheese. There were no dining cars on the train and we could not afford to eat in expensive restaurants, but there were always peddlars selling fruit and juice in the stations. While the train was still settled, quietly rumbling in the station for a few minutes before pulling out again, we leaned out of the windows and stretched our arms to the vendor holding plum-filled cones made of rolled-up newspaper. Sometimes the cones were filled instead with apples or fresh, hard pears. We experienced at these times such simple delights--biting into a tart, crisp apple, leaning against the cool window, watching the hills and villages roll by, confident that wherever it was that we were going, it would be fine.

Then when Rachel and I had our fill of the vagabond life, she would go back to her home in Bucharest and I to mine in Valea Uzului to accompany my mother and father on their vacation. While we were all home my father could never take advantage of his paid vacation; taking us all to a resort

would have cost much more than he could have afforded at the time. Now that my older sisters and brothers were all married, he could finally enjoy his vacations. Even my younger brothers no longer lived at home. Shlomo had met a young woman from a city a thousand kilometers from Valea Uzului and married her in that distant city, my mother having been the only one of our family able to attend the wedding. Eliezer had visited me several times in Bucharest but was now in the Romanian Army. This left only Esther and Zipporah at home.

As I had money of my own now, my father invited me to come along with my mother and him to a resort while Esther and Zipporah stayed home to tend the house. After all the years of being one of the small children who were mostly ignored and then the only daughter who was labeled disobedient, I could not believe that I was singled out for the honor of sharing my parents' vacation. We spent hours leisurely soaking in the mineral baths. I jabbered about my work, my friends, my travels. My mother listened, laughing often as I entertained her with stories for hour after hour. Then she would suddenly flick her hand across the warm water, splashing my face. I tried to splash her back quickly but just like that she was up, out of the water and safely on the grass. "I'm not so old. See!" she would call.

Sometimes in the late afternoon while my mother was chatting with a friend she had made at the spring, my father and I walked together. Often it rained earlier in the day, the rain falling and falling all afternoon in quiet drummings that had come across the mountains in sheets, one after another. Then the clouds would abruptly break apart and the sun appear, bouncing off the sparkling drops of water still clinging to the leaves, to the trees. The world seemed freshly created at these times, the smells of earth and rain mingling with the lightness, a scud of clouds billowing across the water blue sky.

As my father and I walked along the crest of a mountain, he often told me things that I do not think he ever mentioned to any of my sisters and brothers--how it was at his parents' home, what he liked to do as a boy, how he felt about his responsibilities. "Some people do not take being a parent seriously," he said one day. "There is nothing more important than keeping a family together. I have always tried to do that above all else. Even the mill does not mean as much to me as my family." So my father and I grew to enjoy each other's company, there on those walks under the radiant skies of Romania. I treasure almost more than anything the memory of those walks with my tall, fair father.

At the end of 1937 it became apparent that the relative calm of the last few years in Romania was coming to an end. In the December elections the National Liberal Party, one of the moderate groups that Carol II had managed to control, was defeated and the way was open for the powerful right-wing groups to come into power. Frightened by this possibility, Carol II dissolved parliament, proclaimed a royal dictatorship in April, 1938, and attempted to suppress the Iron Guard. Its members responded by increasing their marches and attacks. Every month it became more difficult than the month before to live as a Jew in Bucharest.

One day in the fall of 1938 Rachel and I met two friends after work and went to a nearby restaurant for supper. None of us felt like going out as a large group, as we had for the past few years; most of the time my friends and I went about our work as unobtrusively as possible and met only in small, quiet places where we would not attract attention. As we sat down to eat our meal that night the conversation began with a familiar theme: the

outrageousness of the latest rumors. "Have you heard?" asked Simon, Rachel's companion. "They've broken into all the Jewish shops in Germany--smashed the windows with their guns."

"No," Rachel said: "I cannot believe it."

"It's true! Entire shops were destroyed. Soldiers even set fire to the synagogues. The rabbis ran through the streets but they could not stop them."

As he said the words I saw in my mind the bearded rabbis in their long robes stumbling over the sharp shards of glass lying all over the streets, the menorahs and scrolls flung into the muddy gutters. It could not be true. Attacks on individual Jews were becoming commonplace but I could not imagine the destruction of temples. I thought of the small buildings at my father's mills where we had worshipped. Those synagogues had never been harmed. "Maybe this is just another rumor started by the Iron Guard to frighten us," I said.

"It happened!" exclaimed Simon. "Jews were pulled out of their homes, books piled into heaps and burned all night long."

"But why would the Germans do this? What reason did they give?" asked Rachel.

"Some poor Jew who couldn't stand the persecution any longer killed the German legation secretary. He couldn't have done anything worse. The Nazis used it as an excuse to rampage through the Jewish sections of city after city."

"I still don't believe it," I said. "No human beings would do this to other human beings. Maybe things like this happened hundreds of years ago, but not anymore. We are civilized. We have radios and telephones." Even as

I said the words I did not believe them entirely. My instincts had told me to leave for Palestine three years ago. Life had become only more difficult for us since then. At the time I still could not allow myself to think that a group of people who felt the need to imagine themselves superior could simply set out to destroy those people whom they considered inferior.

Then one spring day in 1939 Rachel did not come to the salon to work. The next day she was still absent. I tried to tell myself that she was ill and would come back soon, but as the days went by and she did not return I could stand it no longer and ran to her home after work one evening. No one was there. The house was locked, silent, one broken chair left on its side in the dining room. I went from window to window, trying to find a sign that her family was simply away on a visit--a note on the back door, a suitcase not needed at the last minute. I found nothing and went back to my room alone. I never saw Rachel again.

That summer I did not travel. Rachel was gone. I did not feel like going without her. Journeying from Bucharest, a city offering little but loneliness and fear, to my home in the mountains high above the quiet, valley floor seemed more and more like waking from a nightmare into a fairy tale dream. Even a fairy tale has hungry wolves, however, and while such creatures were beginning to prowl across Europe, my family continued to blind themselves to everything. When I walked listlessly through the house, missing Rachel almost more than I could bear, my mother suggested that perhaps it was time that I quit my job and stay home with them where it was safer.

"But how long will it be safe here?" I asked her. "Jewish people

have never been protected simply because they live in a remote village. On my way home from Bucharest I can ride through seven villages in a row and not find one single Jewish family. I've stopped at all of them at various times and asked the station master, 'Is there a Jewish family living here?' knowing they would let me spend an hour or two with them between trains. In every one of those seven villages the station master has looked at me suspiciously and said, 'No, the only Jews nearby are at the lumber mill.'"

"Yes, I know," answered my mother. "If I had not been so busy taking care of all of you I would have been quite lonely with so few other Jewish families nearby. But we have always been unharmed. Even that time when we thought the students were coming and you were almost boiled alive, we were left entirely alone. It was just a rumor. I can still see you falling across the door sill!" She began to laugh, hugging me close. "Oh, Sereń, why don't you stay home with us now?"

"I have to go back," I answered. "My job is waiting for me. It is too much to give up."

"Well, I can't convince you," my mother said. "You have always been my little bird with wings that won't be clipped. But remember that we'll always be here. You can come home whenever you like if you change your mind."

In the fall of 1939 I went back to Bucharest with that thought, that at least my home would be a refuge if I needed one, and tried to lose myself in my work once more. "Perhaps my mother is right," I thought, "and the injustices we are experiencing daily in Bucharest will never be felt in Valea Uzului. Maybe the rumors from Germany are just that, rumors, and have no truth behind them. Maybe Rachel's family has simply decided to move and they are perfectly safe somewhere."

Then on September 21, Germany invaded Poland. A few days later the streets were full of Polish Army officers and their families. They had run from the advancing German Army, coming however they could--in cars, trucks and tanks, on motor bikes and bicycles. Entire households were stuffed into trunks, tied to the roofs of cars, thrown into the back ends of trucks, balanced precariously on handle bars, heaped into tiny wheelbarrows wobbling over the cobblestones. One afternoon a tiny girl brushed against me as she stumbled along, clinging to her mother's coat with one hand and rubbing tears from her eyes with the other. She looked exhausted from walking. "At least I do not have children," I thought. I was twenty-one by now and I had no husband or babies to worry about. "If I can continue to take care of myself," I decided, "I will be doing well."

That night, however, when I came back to my room, the image of the child who had stumbled into me suddenly appeared in my mind. A great sense of sorrow overwhelmed me and I fell across my bed. All night long I cried--for the child, for all children, for mothers and fathers in the time of war, for Rachel, for myself.

All through that winter of 1939 and the spring of 1940 the threat of the war reaching us was imminent. The great powers of Hitler's Germany on the west and Stalin's Russia on the east and north appeared waiting to cut down Romania at any moment, especially now that they were allied and Romania only a trifle between them.

My friends continued to disappear. One week Abram was arguing with us and the next week not a trace of him could be found. Simon disappeared next and then two of my girlfriends from the salon. If I had been told they were

leaving or if I had received a letter from them later I would not have felt abandoned, alone. I never knew whether they had fled the city during the night and were safe somewhere or whether they had been arrested by the Iron Guard and were huddled in a jail cell.

In June Romania began to disintegrate. Russia demanded both Bessarabia, the northeast corner of Romania, and Bucovina, a little sliver of land on the northern border, and received both. This blow was quickly followed in August by the loss of three-fifths of Transylvania to Hungary. My worst fears had come true; the war had reached our home in Valea Uzului. My family was no longer living on Romanian soil. The village of Valea Uzului remained with Romania; the mill up on the mountain above the village was on land that became part of Hungary, the new border running between the village the the mill. My family was thus caught between two nations that resented each other bitterly. Romania felt that her land had been stolen outright by both Russia and Hungary; Hungary felt that she was simply regaining territory lost during World War I.

It was the Jews who were used as the scapegoat for all of this resentment. Three months after Romania lost Bessarabia to Russia, I walked to the sector of Bucharest where several of my friends lived. This whole area of the city had been settled by Jewish people coming from Bessarabia and was called the Russian sector as Bessarabia had adjoined Russia before it was annexed. I was particularly anxious to see these friends, who were sisters, as they were the only ones I had left in the entire city. "Perhaps they'll have news of acquaintances who've disappeared," I thought, "and we can comfort and encourage each other." As I strode through the September late afternoon these thoughts filled me with hope and I noticed for the first time the brilliant

reds and oranges of the turning leaves. I could even smell the strong odor of burning and found pleasure in imagining someone cleaning a yard as if everything were not falling apart. If a man or woman was burning leaves then perhaps life was still somewhat normal.

As soon as I drew close to the Russian sector I knew I could not have been more wrong. It was not leaves that were burning; whole houses had been flaming and were still smoking. Blackened buildings stood in outline against the sky wherever I looked, in all directions, empty shells quietly sifting into ash in the still light. A sense of emptiness washed over me. No one was walking home after working in the city all day, no one was opening the door in welcome, no one was dishing supper into bowls. I walked hurriedly on to where my friends lived, hoping for the slight chance that their house had been spared. We told ourselves things like this throughout the war: someone else has felt pain and horror but somehow it will not touch me or anyone who knows me. The mind tries to protect itself again and again.

When I reached the spot where their home should have been, only a pile of burned boards and a soot-darkened chimney remained. I stood there by myself for a long moment, unwilling to believe what I saw, until I felt suddenly very cold. Realizing then that it was rapidly growing dark and that I should return to my room, I turned away and began to run, saying to myself over and over, all the way back: "Let them be safe! Let them be safe! Let them be safe!"

Every day after that I would think, "Am I crazy for staying here? Should I go home?" Then I would answer myself, "Home would be no better. There is nowhere to go that is safe." I remained in Bucharest, taking each day as it came. Romania had by now lost a third territory: southern Dobroja

against my ribs. Finally I calmed myself, slipped inside, sat down at my machine and tried to begin sewing. But throughout the day I found myself staring at the needle, at the cloth, thinking, "What if I had been killed? I am alone. All my friends are gone. My family is far away. I am terribly alone."

During the following week I continued to stay with my Gentile landlady who had been kind to me and did not insist that I move even though many Jewish people were being singled out and segregated from the rest of the population. I was very grateful for this and tried to relax somewhat. However, a few days after the truck attempted to run me down, a girl at the salon told me, "The Iron Guard has begun arresting all of the prominent Jewish people in Bucharest."

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yes. My father works for the Jewish Federation. Yesterday soldiers with swastikas on their arms came into the room where they were having a meeting and grabbed all the officers of the Federation. Luckily my father is only a clerk so they left him alone. But he's frightened. He didn't want me to come to work today but I talked him into it. 'Nobody cares about me,' I told him.

"I can't believe it," I said. My heart began to race as if the truck were bearing down on me again.

"My father has heard of others who were also arrested--Mr. Bergblatt, the president of that huge department store downtown, and Mr. Stein, the manufacturer. He thinks the Iron Guard may also be arresting some prominent doctors and lawyers. Aren't you glad that you are just a little seamstress? No one will want us. We aren't important enough."

"How can you say that no one will want us?" I asked. Rachel is gone. Most of the other girls are gone. You and I are practically the only ones left in the salon. I don't know where any of my friends are."

"Oh, they must have done something wrong that we didn't know about! But we have done nothing. We're nobodies. They have no reason to arrest us, so they won't."

I could not share her optimism in the least. All of my friends had been cautious, law-abiding people. I knew that any Jewish person could be singled out for persecution without a cause. I had been beaten by classmates for no reason, humiliated by teachers repeatedly for no reason, lost my best friend for no reason. I was terrified. "What will happen next?" I wondered. "What can possibly happen next?"

The following morning I boarded a streetcar for work, rapidly climbing up the steps to the car. As soon as I was seated I began to glance at the other passengers, positive that someone was watching me. Cringing further into the corner of the seat, I wished that I could disappear into its fabric. Although my light hair and blue eyes gave me the appearance of a Gentile, I realized that the government knew that I was Jewish. Maybe they would even come across my papers today and tonight I would hear a knock on the door, a loud demand and be pulled from my bed and shoved into a prison cell.

As I was imagining this--the cruel faces of the soldiers, the cold, dark cell--a woman sitting in the front of the streetcar began to scream. The other passengers and I quickly twisted in our seats, trying to see exactly who was screaming and why. Was she being attacked? Arrested? Then the man in front of me said in a soft voice overcome with horror, "Oh, my God." He pointed to the window. I looked out but saw at first only trees and benches.

We were passing a small park called "The Square of June Eighth." Then I saw it--a sign nailed to two stakes and proclaiming in large, red letters: "Kosher Meat for Sale." Behind it, suspended on huge, butchers' steel hooks, were the bodies of men, Jewish men, hanging lopsidedly on the thick hooks, their heads drooping to one side, arms falling limp beside their thighs. An early snow from the night before clung to their dark wool coats, to their legs dangling apart in the still, cold air, to the useless shoes pointing downwards to the earth.

I recognized several of the men as the leaders of the Jewish Federation while others looked like doctors or businessmen. Then, as quickly as it had materialized, the scene was gone. The streetcar had passed by and was soon one block away, two blocks away from the Square. I sank back into my seat and closed my eyes, unable to believe what I had just viewed from my window. I kept seeing the dead men. There must have been twenty of them fastened there in a row. Behind my eyelids they still swung back and forth, impaled on the sharp hooks.

Suddenly I felt as if I would vomit. Bolting from the streetcar as soon as it came to a stop, I began to run, running as fast as I could, running blind.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The thought of remaining in Bucharest even one more day became unbearable. The city was closing in on me. I had to get out. Home was where I wanted to be more than anywhere. In her last letter Mama had written:

> Dear Seren, my child,
>
> Won't you please change your mind and come home to us once more? It's lonely here. We're completely cut off from the village now that the border has been changed. Your two sisters and I spend most of our time inside the house while your father keeps busy shipping out the last loads of lumber.
>
> I'm so worried about your brother Eliezer. Herman heard a rumor that Eliezer has deserted the army. One night some soldiers from the Iron Guard came into his dormitory and started removing Jewish men. They took them outside to shoot them one by one. Eliezer crept out the back door and ran away before they got to him. No one knows where he is. I'm afraid that he will be killed.
>
> Many young, Jewish men are building a road across the mountains. The Iron Guard took them out of Budapest and put them into a group they call the Labor Force. Maybe Eliezer will be placed in one of these groups . . . if he isn't shot first, God forbid. I am very grateful that your father is too old for the army. At least he will not be forced to do such hard work and can stay here with us until this terrible war ends.
>
> The weather has turned very cold. At night the wolves from the forest come right up to our bedroom windows looking for food. I'm so frightened when I see their eyes glowing at me in the darkness.
>
> I'll ask just one more time and then I'll close. Please come home to us. We all send our love.
>
> Mama

After reading the letter one more time I decided to leave Bucharest immediately and return to Valea Uzului. I did not know exactly how I would get there as some of the trains were no longer running, nor did I know if I would be able to cross the border at the village once I arrived. One way or another, however, I would reach my mother and father, my sisters, the love that was waiting to enfold me, welcome me home.

Quickly abandoning the idea of trying to travel with two or three suitcases, I reached to the top shelf of the closet and pulled down my knapsack which would allow me to walk for long distances if necessary. As I was going through my drawers, trying to make as little noise as possible, my landlady knocked softly. I jumped, positive that she had been listening on the other side of the door. Closing the drawers and kicking the knapsack under the bed, I said in a voice that I tried to make as calm as possible, "Come in."

She opened the door slowly, as if she knew that she was intruding, came in and crossed to the bed where she sat down. For a long while she said nothing, looking at her folded hands. Then she began, "I've wanted to tell you something for some time, but I didn't know how to say it. I . . . " She paused for a few seconds and then continued. "The things that have been happening to the Jewish people are horrible, horrible. I am so ashamed." She stopped again. Finally she raised her eyes to look at me. "I worry about you. If it were up to me, none of this would be happening."

"I'm leaving," I said. "Tonight. I was packing as you knocked." I opened a drawer as if to convince her and saw my wool sweater the color of wheat. It was as thick and soft as the down I had once lain on high in the hayloft in Fúleháza. "Would you like to have this sweater?" I asked. "It would take up too much room in my knapsack."

"Will you be all right? What will you do?" she asked, ignoring the sweater.

"I'm taking the train home tonight."

"That's too dangerous!" she answered quickly. "My son, Nicolai, the one in the army, came home last night. He can stay for only a day. Oh, how I hate this war! Anyway, he came on the train from Brasov and he said that

the Iron Guard is patrolling all the trains. They are looking for any Jewish people."

"But I have to get home!"

She looked directly into my eyes then, as if seeing me for the first time. "I have an idea," she said. "Nicolai has to report back by midnight. He can go with you, at least while you board the train. With your blonde hair and fair complexion, you could easily pass for his sister."

"Will he do it? He doesn't know me. I don't think he has ever seen me for more than a few minutes."

"Of course he will do it!" she answered. "Since when can a son refuse his mother? I think he would do it anyway, even if I didn't ask him. He did not choose to be in this war. He is a good person . . . loving, kind, like his brother." She paused then, looking down at the floor for a minute or two without saying anything.

Taking the wheat-colored sweater and placing it in her arms, I said, "I would be very grateful if your son would go with me to the train." She still said nothing, fingering the thick, woolen strands with one hand.

Finally she said, "Do you remember when my other son, Pietru, married last year? I went to the wedding in a village on the Russian border and was gone for a week."

"Yes, I remember."

"He married a Jewish girl. Her name is Anna. She is a beautiful girl with thick hair that flows down her back in black waves. They are expecting a baby in six months." Her voice broke. "I'm so frightened for them," she continued. "They've gone into hiding near Anna's home village. I wanted them to stay with me but 'No, no,' Pietru said. 'The Iron Guard will not search

outside the villages.' I can't even visit them! My first grandchild . . . "

"I'm sorry," I said. Then I remembered that I must finish packing. "Please take anything else I leave," I told her.

"I'll put everything away for you. When the war is over you can come back and stay with us. You've been a good boarder. We'll get to know each other better then."

"Yes," I answered. "I'll come back when the war is over."

That evening, as soon as it was dark, Nicolai and I set out for the depot. As we approached the station I had to keep fighting with myself to keep from turning and bolting for my room. Nicolai walked briskly beside me in his uniform, saying nothing after he warned: "Remember. You are my sister and you are going to visit our grandmother who is ill. Do not say anything. Act normal." When he said it I thought, "But what is normal? I have forgotten what it is like not to be afraid." Nevertheless, I hurried to keep up with him, his long legs covering twice as much distance as mine.

When we reached the depot, Nicolai purchased my ticket and placed my knapsack in a corner of the rear car next to the other baggage. "Follow me," he said as he rapidly climbed up the steps to a passenger car and strutted down the aisle. I fastened my eyes on the creases across the shoulder blades of his jacket as they moved slightly up and down, following the movements of his swinging arms.

Suddenly, he stopped and I quickly peered around him. I could not believe it. He had marched all the way to the other end of the car, past all the civilian passengers, to a seat holding two officers of the Romanian Army. Looking to my right, I saw an elderly woman sitting with a large basket on her lap; she looked kind and I was very tempted to ease down in the empty seat

beside her. Then I heard Nicolai say to one of the officers, "This is my sister. She is on her way to care for our grandmother who is quite ill. Could you look after her? She has never traveled alone before." Nicolai took me by the arm and gently pulled me forward.

One officer stood up immediately. "Of course!" he replied. "She can sit here between us. Is she traveling far?"

"To Valea Uzului."

"Ah, so far. Well, she will be fine sitting here. It's a good thing you brought her to us. Who knows what might happen as long as they let those damn Jews ride the trains. The sooner they get rid of all of them, the better!"

"Yes, precisely," Nicolai answered. Then he turned to me. "Have a good trip and say hello to Grandmother. Tell her I send my hopes for a quick recovery." With that he saluted the officers, turned on his heel and quickly began to pace down the aisle. I wanted to yell after him, "Wait! Don't leave me here alone." How could I sit here between these two men hour after hour, all night long, with the fear that any moment something would give me away?

In less than a minute Nicolai was at the other end of the car. I sat down, drawing my arms tightly against my chest and away from the uniformed shoulders on both sides of me. The two men ignored me completely, the officer on my left lost in reading and the one on my right, the one who had spoken to Nicolai, putting his head back on the seat and closing his eyes. I sighed, greatly relieved, for I was sure that I would be revealed for who I was if questioned about anything. "If I can simply sit here while the long hours crawl by," I thought, "everything might be all right."

The train had barely pulled out of the station when I saw, out of the

corner of my eye, a number of men in the dark green shirts and brown trousers of the Iron Guard uniform come pounding down the station platform. Three or four of them reached the steps to our car, vaulted up them and rushed into the other end of the car. "They've come to get me!" I thought, my heart beating rapidly, my whole chest aching. "Someone recognized me while Nicolai and I were on our way here. They reported me! Maybe Nicolai reported me!"

My hands broke out in a sweat so cold that they felt icy, frozen, and I longed to bury them inside my coat, but I was afraid that the slightest movement would draw attention to me. I sat perfectly still, watching the Iron Guard. They quickly began to stride down the aisle, two on each side of the rows of seats, shouting in harsh voices, "Show me your identification!" All of the passengers held out the cards, their eyes pleading: "Let it be all right."

For the first half of the car the identification was the proper one; the passengers were Gentiles. Their cards were thrust back at them without a word and the soldiers lunged forward to the next row of seats. Then one of the soldiers, stopping beside a very old man clutching a bundle, grabbed the old man's card and stared at it. A few seconds later, he grasped the man by the collar of his coat and yanked him out of his seat.

The blanket-covered bundle flew open and five or six photograph albums fell to the floor. One landed upside down, the contents tumbling all across the aisle. Close to my feet I saw a black and white photograph of a young boy standing barefoot on a path in the woods. He was wearing a jacket, breeches and a little cap pushed back on his head. The boy was looking straight at the camera, smiling, his eyes slightly lowered. As I was considering reaching and picking up the photograph for the old man, the Iron Guard soldier yelled,

"Filthy scum! Filthy, Jew scum!" Then he shoved the old man in front of him, forcing him to walk over the spilled photographs. When the old man saw this, he stepped lightly, trying to avoid them, but the black boot of the soldier came down directly on top of the little boy's picture, squashing his face. A minute later we heard the door at the end of the car open, the wind rush in and then a scream, beginning in a high whine and then suddenly dropping in tone, trailing behind the train for a few seconds until it was lost in the roaring dark.

The Iron Guard continued down the aisle towards me, expelling another Jewish man and then finding the elderly woman with the basket who was sitting directly in front of me. When the soldier began to curse her she pleaded, "No! No! Let me stay! Please!" The soldier grabbed her roughly, threw her basket of bread and rolls to the floor and pulled her towards the exit. She clung to the back of the seat with both hands until the soldier smashed against them with the butt of his bayonet. Another soldier began to shove her from behind and the two of them pushed the heavy woman along, finally reaching the rear of the car. Again the scream cut through the blackness for a few seconds and then abruptly ended.

The Romanian Army officer on my right spoke for the first time. "These Iron Guard men are a little too coarse for me. You would think they could find some better way of getting rid of the Jews! The rest of us should not have to be exposed to this kind of thing. What are our women to think? This is not something they should have to see." He looked quickly at me, and I began to shake violently. I could not tell whether I was on the verge of vomiting or fainting. "Stay calm. Stay calm," I ordered myself, hugging my body with my folded arms and closing my eyes. I could hear the Iron Guard soldiers

returning from the exit. There was no one left to show the identification card except me and the Romanian soldiers sitting beside me. "I will wait until they ask," I decided. "I will sit here perfectly still until they ask."

Then I heard the soldiers march by again, bypassing me completely and continuing down the aisle to the place where they had started their search. They were not going to ask me! I realized in an instant that they had assumed I was with the Romanian officers and obviously not Jewish.

During the rest of the night I sat there trembling; immediately after I decided that I was not going to be thrown off the train, I realized that different soldiers from the Iron Guard could board the train at any of the depots along the way and I would have to go through the same agony all over again. I could not even get off the train at a station, as Nicolai had told the officers that I was going all the way to Valea Uzului. There was nothing left for me to do but sit there and count off the stations, one by one. "See if you can make it from here to Ploiesti," I told myself. "Do not think about the rest of the trip. Just think about getting to Ploiesti." Once the train was in Ploiesti I willed myself to endure until Moinesti. Finally, towards morning, we pulled into the station at Valea Uzului without any more soldiers from the Iron Guard storming through the train.

The faintest traces of light were beginning to appear on the horizon as I descended the steps to the platform, trembling so greatly that I could barely walk. I wanted to fall down on the ground by the station and rest until the terror subsided, but I was not at my home, still having to ride the small lumber train up into the mountains to the mill. I picked up my knapsack, walked to the locked door of the station and sank down in the cold darkness to wait for the lumber train.

After what seemed like a long time I finally heard the train rumbling towards the station. I jumped up quickly, stamping my feet, my toes numb and lifeless after sitting so long in the cold. As soon as the train came to a stop I ran to it and began to climb into the cab of the engine where I always rode. The engineer, not the one who had always been there but a new one, stepped in front of me as I was climbing up the last step.

"Hey! Where do you think you're going?" he yelled.

I was so surprised that I could not think of what to say for a minute. Finally I stammered. "To the m . . . mill."

"No, you're not. No one is allowed to cross the border. Guards are posted all along it."

"But I live there! I mean, my family lives there. My father is the manager of the mill."

"The mill is shutting down. Now get off this train!"

"I rode this train before--every time I came home for a visit."

"Hey, Gregor," the engineer yelled to a man loading boxes onto a car, "do you recognize her? She says she lives at the mill."

The man stared at me for a long minute. His clothes were covered with grease and his hair was slick with dirt and oil. A thin mustache trailed down both sides of his mouth. "Naw," he answered. "I never seen her. But I'll take her home with me. Come on over here, why don't you?" he called to me.

My stomach lurched and I began to shake again. Turning around abruptly, I descended the steps as fast as I could and ran from the men laughing at me as I fled. Quickly I reached the edge of the forest beginning at the bottom of the mountain and reaching up above me for as far as I could see. Somewhere between here and the mill was the border, but I had no idea of exactly where.

The attempts my mother had made in her letters to describe the location had been scratched out by an official who censored all mail going out of Hungary. I decided that I knew these woods better than any border guards; all I would have to do was avoid them. I would hike up the mountain until I came to the road that the owner of the mill had built for his car and follow it home.

I began to climb up into the forest, grateful that I had worn sturdy walking shoes and had no suitcase to carry, only the knapsack on my back. Climbing was easy here as I picked my way between the ferns and ivy growing lush on the forest floor. For the first hour tall pines surrounded me on every side. I walked through beds of soft, dry needles that swished lightly with each footstep. Suddenly I came across an oval indentation where a deer had bedded down. Sheltered and dark, it was a hiding place in the middle of the forest and I longed to sink down into it and rest; I had been unable to sleep at all during the long night on the train. Finding my way would be much harder in the dark, however, so I hurried on, determined to reach home by nightfall.

A little further up the mountain, to the right of a circle of giant boulders, was a stand of oaks that Esther had pointed out one time on our way through the forest on the train. It would have been easy to follow the train tracks but as the train could not go up the steep grades, the tracks curved back and forth in long switchbacks. I chose instead a more direct route--almost straight up the steep side which was by now growing more rugged. Huge outcroppings of rock jutted out from the mountain, ending abruptly in cliffs falling down to lower valleys. After climbing up one of these, my breath coming in short gasps as I dug into the niches with my fingers, I crawled away from the edge and rested against a slab of granite. Looking

down I saw the whole village spread below me on the valley floor. Smoke from the peasant huts drifted up into the clear air. Two black hawks circled in low glides, crossing each other's arcs.

Then, as I was beginning to feel that I was the only person up on the quiet mountain, I heard crashing sounds in the distance. I dashed into the oaks to one side and hid behind a large tree. A whole group of men, thirty or thirty-five in all, were approaching. They were all wearing yellow arm bands bearing the Star of David and were accompanied by soldiers. "This must be the Labor Force," I decided, for the men all carried shovels, picks and axes. They walked by quickly, their feet crackling through the branches, and then were gone.

Hours passed without seeing any other person. I crossed a level plain and then climbed another ridge, my legs numb with fatigue. I longed to take off my coat, heavy on my shoulders, longed to be home, sitting by the fire, drinking a cup of my mother's hot tea.

Then I heard a sound, a low murmuring, so faint at first that I did not know what it was. Before very long the rich smell of damp earth drifted into my nostrils and I knew that the sound was of water trickling down over the rocks of a mountain stream. Beginning to walk a little faster, I climbed over an enormous, fallen tree and then saw, just on the other side, a tiny current of water gurgling down around tree stumps and smoothly-polished stones. Hurriedly, I took off my knapsack and knelt beside the stream, scooping up some water with my hands. It was like ice, cold, my fingers burning with the pain of the freezing water. I quickly splashed it into my mouth and it slid down my throat, making my whole body convulse with shivers. "I have to get warmer," I thought, and looked for a clear, sun-filled spot. Seeing a burned-

out tree in the middle of a circle of light a few yards away, I grabbed my knapsack and hurried towards it. Once there I sank against the trunk and rested by the comforting din of the stream for a few minutes. A little refreshed and slightly warmer, I put on my knapsack and continued up the mountain.

By the middle of the afternoon I reached a thick fence of barbed wire stretching across the mountain side. It was the border, I realized, and wondered why I saw no guards. Following the fence for a way, I came across a gate held closed by a simple latch. I stretched out my hand to release it and then drew it back instantly. "Suppose this is a trick!" I thought. "Maybe the guards are hiding in the woods and will seize me once I open the gate and cross to the other side!" I looked around behind me, in every direction, but I could see no one, nothing. Very carefully I opened the latch, stepped through the gate and closed it behind me. Nothing happened. The fear that the guards were waiting for me up ahead swept through me again.

I hurried on, in a short while reaching the small road leading to the mill. Just ahead, I knew, was the castle where the owner lived and beyond that, the beautiful gardens of flowers and strawberries, the mill, our house. Soon I had reached the castle. By the time darkness was beginning I finally saw the outline of the mill buildings through the trees. I began to run, hoping to see my father walking through the yard, but he was nowhere in sight. Scrambling up the last stretch of road, I reached my house at last. My mother was turning to go inside when she heard my footsteps and saw me, collapsing on the front steps.

"Sereń! Oh, Sereń! Where have you come from?"

I lay there gasping, unable to catch my breath. "Have you come through the woods?" I nodded my head. She ran to me then. "The wolves!" she said. "The woods are full of wolves. They're starving. They might have attacked you!"

"Oh, I forgot about the wolves," I answered. "I completely forgot."

"You forgot?" she said, bursting into laughter. "You forgot?" She drew me to her then, her head bobbing up and down on my shoulder. We remained for a long while like that, arms around each other, laughing into the fading autumn light.

CHAPTER EIGHT

That evening my mother and father and I sat at the supper table far into the evening, lingering long after we had finished eating, taking pleasure in the simple delight of being in each other's presence once again. Esther and Zipporah had left that afternoon to stay with a neighboring family overnight so there were only the three of us. My mother and my father, my mother and my father--I looked from one to the other, back and forth. I could not get enough of gazing at them.

My mother's face continually broke into smiles. As we ate she reached across the table repeatedly to touch my hand, to say, "I can't believe you are home with us once more." She was still a young woman, lightly jumping up from the table to get another loaf of bread warming in the oven, a fresh pot of tea. Twenty-five years of marriage had aged her very little. The young bride my father had brought home to mother all his children, to give him more, looked at him still. He sat quietly, as sedate as always, softly stroking his goatee from time to time, but his hand trembled slightly and his eyes were full, shining. I reached over and stroked his arm, as strong and firm as the arm of a young man, and asked, "How are you, Father?"

"I am well," he answered. He was. Although my father was sixty-seven by now, he looked like a man twenty years younger; his hair was full, the light color of it masking any grayness that may have dared to appear, and he walked with the determined gait of a man in full use of all his capacities. He seemed, however, less rigid, softer.

"Was it difficult coming home?" he asked.

"Yes. I did not know if I would make it all the way. The Iron Guard threw any Jews they found on the train into the ravines beside the tracks. And then I couldn't even board the lumber train!"

"You tried to board the lumber train?" my father asked, standing up quickly.

"Yes, like I always have."

"But you would have been arrested!" he said. "That train stops at the border every time it goes back and forth between Valea Uzului and the mill. It is searched by the border guards. They would have thought you were a spy."

"But how could I be a spy? I was only trying to get home."

"Anyone trying to cross the border is a spy to the Hungarians. No one can go from one side to the other. We have been completely cut off from Valea Uzului and from all the rest of Romania since the border was put between the village and the mill."

"Then we can see no one?" I asked.

"No one. My family can no longer come to their own home. Meyer and Lottie, Louise and Bela, Berta and Morris, Herman and Tamara . . . the children. Who knows when we will see them again?" he asked.

"The war will end sometime," my mother said, going to him. "Surely the border will be opened then. We will all be together again. Now, let's go to bed. A good night's rest will do us good and the world will look better tomorrow."

The world did not look any better the next morning, nor would it for a very long time. We did not gather together as one family ever again. While Esther, Zipporah and I were given one more year with both our mother and

father, the portion of the family living in what was left to Romania was gone from them and from us, forever. Meyer and Lottie lived far away in Galati, almost on the Black Sea, Berta and Morris and their two sons in Brasov and Louise and Bela in a distant city near the northern border of Romania. The distance made no difference, however; they would not have been able to visit us had they lived in Valea Uzului.

Even the members of the family living on our side of the border were kept from us. All of the Jewish people living in the villages in the part of Transylvania that was now Hungary were ordered to move into designated cities. A permit to live in the city had to be secured and once you were there you could not leave for any reason. Herman and Tamara and their three sons and Eugene and Rose and their five children all moved out of the neighboring village into the city of Reghinal-Sasesk; Eugene and Rose had moved out of Brasov when the Depression caused Eugene to lose his job at the bank and Herman had found work for him at his mill. We still received mail from all of them, as well as from Shlomo and his wife, but it gave us little comfort. The letters were heavily censored, leaving us feeling more alone than ever.

Then we lost track of Mendel and his wife, Adel. While Mendel had always been the least involved with the family, he had come home with all of the other children on Passover and in the summers. For a few years he and Adel lived in the same village as Herman and Tamara while Mendel worked in the mill with Herman. Then, tiring of this, he had convinced Adel to move to a larger village where there were restaurants and clubs. He had written from there once after the Hungarians took over to say that he and Adel were being forced to move; my mother and father kept looking for the card notifying them of their new address. It never came.

Each time she heard of the displacement of one of her children my mother would go through the litany of naming those away from her: "Herman, Mendel, Meyer, Berta, Rose, Louise, Eliezer, Shlomo. Can it be that they were home with us once, that we were all together here in this house? It seems like a dream." At these times Zipporah, Esther and I would look at one another, each wanting to somehow make up for all the others, and then, realizing that we could not, went about our separate ways.

While I welcomed the peacefulness of the quiet days and nights after the turmoil of life in Bucharest, I soon realized how long a day can be when there is nothing to look forward to: no job, no entertainment, no friends to visit. Even the men at the mill were gone. When the Hungarians occupied our part of Transylvania, any Gentile who was living in the newly-acquired area automatically became a Hungarian citizen within a few days after the occupation. Since the young workers at the mill were from many different countries besides Romania, most of them escaped to their homelands before the border was closed. Only a few older Jewish men who had families living with them remained at the mill, for if one was Jewish there was no homeland to which one might flee. We did not become Hungarian citizens as did the other Romanians living in Transylvania. Neither nation wanted us, Romania nor Hungary, so we were regarded as aliens. Suddenly we were a people without a country.

Time slowed to a melancholy crawl. For about six months my father continued to go to the mill every day as the last orders of lumber were loaded on the train and shipped. The mill owner had made an agreement with the Hungarians allowing him to fill existing orders with the lumber already cut. When these orders were met the mill closed down. Some days when I could not

stand for one minute longer the long, silent afternoons inside our house, the idleness driving me to distraction, I wandered over to the mill yard. The big saws sat cold and quiet. The air was still. Everywhere I looked there was nothing to see but the leveled, empty spaces where the piles of lumber used to stand.

One day when I was on one of these solitary walks I glimpsed a view of my father across the mill yard. He had just finished chopping wood for the fireplace and now stood, ax in hand, staring into the forest at the place where the trail began. I stopped, thinking that someone was coming through the woods and my father was waiting to see who it was. After a while I realized that no one was coming; my father was lost in thought, perhaps remembering how the young men had once come tramping down that trail, shouting and laughing to each other, throwing friendly snowballs. Such life had been in them! How they could work, laugh, dance! Now the men were all either far away in another country or, if they were Jewish, in the Work Force. I walked up to my father as noisily as I could, not wanting him to know that I had been watching him and said, "Mama has just made some rolls. Why don't you come in and have one with tea?"

He looked at me, his eyes still distant, and nodded. We walked together through the snow melting under the April sun to the house, to the pleasant bustling of my mother hurrying about her work. She was fortunate to have her daily chores to fall back on--the cooking and cleaning and ironing that was never completely finished and always waiting to fill up more time. Her days were still grounded in the daily realities of keeping a house in order, while my father's work was taken from him and most of his children gone. After all the years of giving his strength and time to raising a family, of gathering

his children to him as often as possible, he sat before the hissing fire in the quiet evenings like a man who has been robbed of everything--work, children, grandchildren, all.

Zipporah, Esther and I spent our days and evenings attempting to comfort our mother and father as well as we could. At the same time we could not help feeling that they should be happy to have the three of us there. Then one day we were given a godsend: the Labor Force came to work nearby. The same men that I had seen passing through on my climb up the mountain last October were now brought back to build a road around the mountains. Zipporah, of course, was the first to notice them. One day in the early part of April she came dashing up to the house from the small road by the mill.

"You will never believe it!" she said.

"What? Is it so wonderful?" I asked.

"The Labor Force is building a road all around the mountain--around and around and around." She whirled in the late afternoon light, catching the fading sun on her dark hair, turning until she had to stop from dizziness. "All these men are going to be close to our house for months! It is two hundred kilometers around the mountains. A man told me so."

"What man?"

"Oh, just a man . . . a very handsome man. I invited him to supper."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"Can he come? Will the Hungarian gendarmes allow him to leave the camp?" I asked.

"He assured me that he could come. What will I wear? I don't have a thing to wear . . . Could I wear your blue blouse? Thank you. Oh, I must

At the same timeour resources began to diminish. While the mill was operating my father made enough money to support us reasonably well, but since it had closed in late winter we had no source of income. The pantry which my mother had stocked in the fall as usual tided us over through the spring and then we planted the garden again, but there was never an abundance of food as before the war.

It became more and more difficult to keep up our confidence. No one knew when my father would work again, when we would be able to leave our prison, for it was that, even if it had no walls, or when the war would end. On Shavuot we brought in the flowers, the plum branches and apple blossoms, but they gave us little cheer. Despite the new green shoots of life sprouting everywhere, the world seemed to grow more and more gray. Summer passed in the same manner with no change and when the Days of Atonement came around in the fall our hopes were even less. Another, long, dark winter stretched before us. We might as well have been adrift on an ice flow in a lonely, arctic sea.

Then very early one morning in October of that year, 1941, everything changed; nothing would ever be the same again. A loud knocking banged against the front door. It continued more and more insistently as everyone huddled under the covers, reluctant to jump out onto the cold floors. In another minute the sounds of my father's heavy footsteps could be heard from below as he hurried to the door and then voices came from outside. I ran to the window to look out but the glass was so laced with frost crystals that I could not see. As I was about to crawl back into bed again I heard my father call up the stairs, "Sereń! Sereń! Come down here. Sereń!" My heart seemed to stop. Why would he be calling me? Surely the loud knocking on the door could have nothing to do with me.

I hurriedly pulled on a dress, shoes and stockings and a warm sweater, not even stopping to brush my hair, and ran down the steps as quickly as I could. There at the bottom of the stairs, just inside the door, stood two very tall, heavy-set men wearing dark green uniforms and black hats with ostrich feathers swirling up high. A rifle with a bayonet jutting out past the barrel of the gun was pointing at my father. I gasped. Another bayonet's sharp blade was quickly turned on me. My mother and sisters were beginning to come down the stairs when one of the men asked, "Which one is Sereń?"

"This one, here," said my father, pointing to me.

"How old are the other girls?"

"They are still children, as you can see." With her hair down and in her nightgown, Zipporah did look very young and Esther looked not more than twelve.

"Sereń's coming with us then. I want the two of you outside. Now!"

The two gendarmes both moved one step forward, bringing the bayonets almost to our throats. My father and I ran to get our coats and scarves, putting them on as fast as we could. I followed my father out of the door, glancing up once at my mother and sisters who stood terrified on the stairs. The men came directly after, ordering us to march ahead of them to the middle of the mill yard. We were joined by five other Jewish men who lived near the mill and three of their daughters: Ira Bergman and his daughter, Ruth; Laban Stern and his daughter, Mozelle; Reuben Handler and his daughter, Leah; another, older man named Samuel Mosheh and our old friend Nehamias, the doctor at the mill.

As soon as all ten of us were accounted for the Hungarian gendarmes shouted: "Start walking!" We quickly formed a line, the men at the front and

the daughters behind, a gendarme across from each of us, gun raised, bayonet stretched out at an angle towards our chests. I could scarcely breathe. I knew that my mother and sisters were by now standing at the edge of the mill yard to see what was happening to my father and me, but I did not dare to look back at them one last time. Is this what happened in Bucharest to my friend, Rachel, I wondered--to be taken away without even a chance to say goodbye?

Gusts of wind swirling down around the tall, thin firs on both sides of the road whipped open my coat, tore the scarf from my head. We walked on, one behind the other, down the road recently finished by the Labor Force for mile after mile. The only sounds were the wind whistling down and the tramping of our feet. All the while the gendarmes kept their bayonets high, drawn, ready.

The road wound up, down and around the mountain. Sometimes we climbed up for such a long time that I thought we would never reach the top of the grade, for we were not allowed to rest at any point. Finally we reached the top and then went down again only to reach another steep slope. Every few miles we passed a thatched-roof hut belonging to a peasant family, but there was no one to see. Not a person came out to watch us march by, to wonder where we were going. Lunch time came and went as we walked. The pain of my stomach rubbing against itself reminded me that we had not been allowed to eat breakfast and that all day not even a drink of water had been offered us. I could not stop wishing for a cup of hot tea.

Finally, when the sky was already dark and I saw here and there the eyes of an animal glowing from deep within the forest, we were ordered to halt at the edge of a small farm. A lantern glowed softly in one window of the hut; I pictured the warm kitchen, the fire going, a kettle of simmering,

hot soup. Two of the gendarmes banged on the door with their rifles and soon the peasant and his wife appeared. They were Romanians who were hated on sight by any Hungarians, causing the gendarmes to become even more gruff. "Open your barn!" one of the soldiers ordered. The old farmer came outside in his shirt-sleeves and pants, shuffled to the barn and slid the door open.

"Get inside! All of you!" the gendarmes told us. We walked in quickly, grouping in the aisle between the cow stalls and the feed trough. Then the gendarmes turned to the farmer. "What have you got to eat in that hovel?" he demanded.

"A little bread . . . some milk," the man answered. He was poorly dressed, his shoes held together with twine. "Not much, I'm afraid."

"Bring it out here! We'll be spending the night in your barn. And see if you can come up with something more decent for breakfast!"

The farmer and his wife returned with the food and we were each given a small piece of bread and a cup of tea after the soldiers had taken what they wanted. Once the food was passed out we heard the clicking of a bolt pulled across the outside of the barn door. We were locked inside, the gendarmes standing guard all around the barn. We could hear them pacing back and forth in the darkness.

The men began to talk in quiet whispers, searching for a place to sleep that was not matted with manure. One of them found some clean straw and we spread it around quietly, afraid to make any noise less we be ordered to sleep outside in the wind. Then my father beckoned to me and I lay down near him, using my scarf for a pillow.

"Are you all right?" he whispered.

"Yes," I answered.

"Are you too cold?"

"No, just my feet. They're like ice."

"Here," he said, "put them under the straw next to mine." I did so and felt a little warmer.

"Where do you think they're taking us?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. Perhaps to a work camp. Perhaps nowhere. It has something to do with our living near the border, I think." He paused. "Maybe we will find out what happened to Eliezer now." Again he paused, sighing. Then, "Get some rest, Sereń. We will need it for tomorrow."

I closed my eyes, wondering for a moment how my mother could sleep after her husband and daughter had been taken away, too. Then I gave in to exhaustion, sleeping soundly amid the straw and the cattle nuzzling.

The next morning we were awakened when it was barely light by the voices of the guards. Even before I opened my eyes I knew exactly where I was; my bones felt stiff and cold and I could barely move.

"Outside! Outside!" the gendarmes yelled. We hurried out of the door and gathered in front of the barn where we were given a piece of bread with cheese and a cup of hot water tasting slightly like coffee. After we were each given a hurried turn in the farmer's outhouse, we were again lined up and began marching down the road.

That day passed the same as the one before. We slept in another barn that evening and were fed again by a farmer. Every day after that we tramped along the road around the Carpathians jutting up into the cold, gray October sky. One of the girls, Ruth, developed large blisters as she had not worn good hiking shoes. She hobbled as she walked, tears silently running down her face. None of us said anything, not a word, all day. The gendarmes were

only a meter away with their rifles. We were afraid to say the least word that could either be cause for them to use their weapons now or condemn us later.

Finally, after a week of steady walking all day and sleeping in drafty barns at night, we came down out of the mountains and reached the outskirts of the new capital of the province, Miercurea-Cuic. We had walked two hundred kilometers. We followed the road into the city, relieved that we seemed to be nearing the end of our long days in the biting wind but also fearful of where they were leading us. On and on we went, past the cottages on the outskirts of the city, down the cobblestone pavement, past brick buildings and fenced yards and finally, to the middle of the city.

"Halt!" one of the gendarmes yelled. He came to an abrupt stop, his plume trembling, the gun still pointed at Mr. Stern walking next to him. I looked around me quickly. We were directly in front of a three-story building made of thick gray bricks darkened with moisture and age.

We were left standing there for two long hours, the gendarmes guarding us all the while. Sometimes a man would pass by on the sidewalk, but no one ever looked up; each person kept on walking, eyes down, hurrying by us as fast as he could.

Finally, a gendarme who had gone into the building earlier came out and shouted, "Move! Inside!" We hurried through the front door of the building and entered a long, dark hallway smelling of mold and dampness. When we reached the first corridor leading away from it, we came upon a door made of iron bars immediately to our right. The gendarme stopped, opened the door with a key and shoved the men inside, grabbing each one by the shoulders and pushing him in. Then the door was locked and the other girls and I were

ordered to move forward to another door at the other end of the corridor. It was opened and we were roughly pushed inside. The bolt was locked with a clang that echoed in the stillness. The last sounds we heard were the footsteps of the gendarmes walking back to the other end of the corridor.

CHAPTER NINE

Early the next morning as we were still asleep, a gendarme we had not seen before came to the room where Ruth, Mozelle, Leah and I were huddled together on mats on the floor. "Ruth Bergman!" he shouted. She stood up, trembling, drawing her shoulders together against the cold. Ruth was the tallest of the four of us, but as she stood she seemed to shrink, hiding like a child inside her long coat, her hands disappearing within the dark brown folds of the sleeves.

The guard stared at her for a moment, silently, his eyes narrowed, glanced down at us watching him and then looked again at Ruth. "You are wanted," he said to her and opened the door to the room. She followed him out. The door was locked. We heard them walking back down the corridor, past the room where our fathers were, past the corner, to a place we could not even imagine.

An hour later they returned. Ruth's face was red, swollen, her eyes liquid with tears. She did not look at us or come to us but went instead to the other side of the room and slumped down into a corner, hiding her face in her hands. "Leah Handler!" the guard shouted. "You are next." Leah clutched at Mozelle's arm; the two of them were friends and had walked one in front of the other all the way here. "You better go," Mozelle whispered to her, so she went, pressing one hand hard against her mouth. Again the door was locked.

I went to Ruth who was crying softly. "Did thy hurt you?" I asked.

She shook her head back and forth without lifting it from her arms.

"Did they hurt your father?"

This time she did not answer me. I suddenly feared that her father and all our fathers were harmed.

"Did they?" I asked again

"I don't know. I didn't see him." She began to weep with deep, wrenching sobs. I could think of nothing to do, of nothing to say to her. Then the guard returned with Leah. It was my turn now; I knew it even before he said my name.

I followed him down the corridor as the others had done, glancing quickly at the room in which our fathers were as I went past, but I could see no one; the door was closed and the opening covered. We came to a room with a small, wooden desk placed to one side and one metal chair standing in the middle of the room. There was nothing else--no other chairs, no cabinets, no lamps. Even the top of the desk was bare. The guard ordered me to sit on the solitary chair and then closed the door, leaving me alone. For what seemed like a very long time I sat there waiting. Then the door opened swiftly and two gendarmes strutted in, slamming the door, and faced me, one on each side of the chair.

"What is your name?" demanded the gendarme to my right.

"Sereń Tuvel."

"Where do you live?"

"Valea Uzului."

"Wrong! Where do you live?"

I looked up at him. This soldier was a member of the Hungarian gendarmes, as were the men who had arrested us. He already knew where I lived; his unit had brought us here.

"Valea Uzului," I said again, this time a little louder.

"Where exactly do you live?"

"Near Valea Uzului . . . at the mill up in the mountains."

"You live near the border. Isn't that right?"

"Yes."

"In fact, you live almost on the border."

"Yes."

"You have lived there for a number of years."

"Yes."

"You are an alien, not a Hungarian citizen."

The second gendarme, who had up to this point been silent, suddenly lunged forward and shouted in my face, "You are a spy!"

I sat there stunned. A spy . . . but for whom? I had never been out of the country.

"Admit it! You are a spy."

"I am not a spy," I said softly, my eyes lowered.

"Admit it!"

"I am not a spy." Raising my head, I looked at him directly. "I don't know what you mean."

"You are a filthy Jew . . . a rotten communist Jew! A traitor!" continued the second soldier.

"You know exactly what we mean! You are a collaborator. You do not live on the border for nothing!" the first gendarme shouted. "You will sign a paper admitting to this."

I looked from one to the other and then down again at my hands clenched tightly together in my lap. I could think of no response. The inter-

rogation continued for another half hour, the same accusations stated over and over until I grew numb. It began to seem as if I was on the outside of the room somewhere looking in at myself sitting there, head down, eyes closed. Finally the first gendarme yelled, "Look at me!" I raised my eyes to his. "We are not finished with you. You will admit to these crimes! You will be punished!"

He turned and left, the other man following behind. Immediately a guard came and took me back to the other girls. I sank down on the mat, relieved to be back in this room.

As soon as the gendarmes were through interrogating us, the guards clomped to our cell, handed us buckets and mops and herded us out into the streets. We were taken first to the train station where the passengers stared at us, a strange group comprised of young women carrying pails, brooms and rags guarded by soldiers with bayonets drawn and pointed. I wanted to crawl under a bench and hide. I, who had walked confidently through the streets of Bucharest to the salon, to the dresses waiting for me to sew them into creation, proud of my ability to please my clients, now went as a scrub woman . . . as a criminal.

The four of us were directed to the women's restroom in the station and told to scrub out the toilets and wash the floors. Filthy rags littered the floorboards and cockroaches fluttered out from every corner, scurrying ahead of my feet. The toilet bowls were caked, yellow, grimy; I had to constantly refrain from vomiting into the bowl I was scrubbing.

From the train stations we were marched to the government office buildings where we had to clean more toilets and scrub all of the floors. Everywhere we went the guards followed us, standing as close as possible,

watching every swish of the mop, push of the bucket. Finally at dusk, when all of the toilets and floors were clean, we were taken back to our cell, locked inside and given our first meal of the day--a bowl of broth and a small chunk of bread.

The next morning each of us was again taken out individually and interrogated in the small room, asked the same questions, told to admit to the same things. In the afternoon the procedure was also identical; we were forced to clean more toilets and floors. As this routine continued for the next three days I realized, little by little, that the Hungarians did not feel as free to persecute us as the Iron Guard had felt. While the Iron Guard arrested and murdered Jews without a moment's hesitation, for no cause, the gendarmes of Hungary felt the need to have a reason to arrest us as there were many inter-marriages in Hungary, especially in Budapest, and even the Premier had a Jewish daughter-in-law. The daily interrogations were meant to force us to admit to treason, a just reason for persecution.

Finally, after five days, the guards did not come to us with pails and mops after the interrogations. It was Sunday and the offices would not be open for us to clean. In the afternoon we were led out into the walled courtyard of the prison for an hour. There I saw my father for the first time since we arrived, sitting in the sun with the other men, his back to me. As soon as I looked into his face I could see the difference in him; strands of white were beginning to appear in his beard and hair and he sat bent over, his shoulders hunched together. He smiled when he saw me.

"Sereń," he said.

"Hello, Father. How are you?" I asked anxiously.

"I'm . . . all right. And you?"

"I'm fine."

I sat down beside him and we gazed into each other's eyes for a few moments. "Are you sure you're all right?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm sure." The guards were there as always, walking back and forth with their rifles.

"They have accused . . . " I whispered.

"Yes, I know," he whispered back before I could finish the sentence.

"Have you been to the train station, too?"

"No, on the streets, scrubbing," he answered.

We sat there together for the rest of the hour, hand in hand, each dreaming our separate dreams of home, of Esther and Zipporah, of my mother. Then we were taken back to our cells again.

Another week went by, the days merging together as we went from the interrogation room to the train station to the government buildings and back again to our cell. Every day I was asked the questions, over and over. Every day I was told to confess to the crime of spying. Although I would not admit to anything I had not done, I could not understand how one signed something invisible; no paper was ever shown to me.

One morning as I was crouched in the metal interrogation chair, trying to comprehend exactly what it was I had allegedly done, I glimpsed a movement out of the corner of my eye and then, before I had a chance to flinch, a sudden explosion smashed against the side of my face. I had never felt such intense pain. My whole body contracted into my head as the stabs of pain expanded, overwhelming all other sensations. Then I felt a warm wetness trickling down my cheek and I touched it tentatively. There was red on my hand--blood.

Another wave of shock hit, this time in my shoulder. A loud roaring broke through the stinging every few seconds and finally I realized that the men were still shouting at me. Then my long hair was grabbed by one of the men, wound around his fist and pulled, yanked so hard that I felt as if my scalp would tear away from my head. Finally he let go and I collapsed on the floor. Kicking me in the side with the toe of his boot, the soldier yelled, "Get out! Get out!" I stumbled back to our cell.

That afternoon we were again shoved into the streets. While the men and women on the sidewalks had grown used to seeing us by now, for we had been coming and going like guarded criminals for almost two weeks, they looked at me this time as if I had suddenly appeared from nowhere. A man dressed in the manner of a businessman, all in black, approached me and stopped momentarily as he saw my swollen, bruised cheek. As he continued on by me I felt a sudden stickiness on my cheek, a slime. As I wiped the spit from my face a group of school children walked by laughing and chattering. The drawn bayonets fascinated them and one or two ran back to look at us again. An old man shuffled by then, spat out, "Dirty, rotten Jews. Get out of my way!" One of the boys immediately kicked Mozelle in the leg and when she cried out he glanced at the guard who looked away. The boy kicked her again and then ran off, chanting, "Dirty Jew . . . dirty Jew . . . dirty Jew."

Finally it was Sunday again and I could see my father. The beatings had continued all week, always including pulling my hair until finally, one day the skin behind my ears cracked, and blood ran down my neck. Now I saw my father sitting on a bench next to Reuben Handler, talking quietly. I could not believe it was my father; his hair and beard had turned entirely white

and he sat hunched over, bent down like an old grandfather with no teeth. I stared at him for a few moments. Then I walked up to him, smiled, sat down beside him and clutched his hand in both of mine.

"It's a nice day," I said.

"Yes," he answered softly.

"The sun feels warm."

"It does."

"I'm so happy to see you again."

"Thank you." He paused, looking into my eyes. The strong blue color of his irises, as clear as the sky above the mountains after a rain, seemed to have been washed away, leaving his eyes pale, faded. "How are you, Sereń?" he asked.

"Oh, all right, I always get along." I did not mention the change in his appearance, the withering; it was too painful for me to acknowledge. So we sat, his hand in mine, taking comfort in simply being with each other for as long as we were allowed.

The next morning when I was taken in for questioning a different officer was there wearing a uniform unlike those of the gendarmes. His was more like those worn by the Iron Guard: tall, black boots with the trousers stiffly tucked inside; a black belt over a brown military jacket; a dark, slanted cap bearing an eagle and the same symbol, the red swastika. He spoke to the other men in German, saying, "Leave me alone! I will take care of her." They closed the door and immediately he began to yell at me in German. I had studied the language in school and could understand the meaning of the words themselves but still could make no sense of what I was being asked to admit.

"You are a spy. Admit it! Now!" he demanded.

I sat there, trying to think of what to say.

"Admit it!" he shouted again, striking me on the shoulder.

"I don't know when I was a spy. I don't know what to admit," I said quietly.

"Don't play those games with me! This is an officer of the Third Reich who is speaking to you. I won't stand for all of those lies you have been telling the stupid Hungarian officers. Do you understand?"

Again he paused, waiting for me to answer. Then he struck me again. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," I said.

"Good. I have been warned about you. You are the worst of this whole, stinking lot! Not only have you lived on the border, not only have you been a spy for our Russian communist enemies, but you have crossed the border. You entered Hungary illegally over a year ago. You came from Bucharest as a spy and stole across the border. You are in league with the capitalistic, communistic devils who are trying to take over the world with their godless atheism. There is nothing worse than an evil Jew, a Christ-killer, who has turned his back on his country as well as on God!" He went on and on, shouting the same things over and over, pacing back and forth in front of me for over an hour. I tried not to listen but I heard all of the words; they rang in my head like hammers and I could not stop them.

Finally the haranguing stopped, the pacing stopped. I looked up. He fell on me, striking my face with both fists, slamming into my eyes, my cheeks and jaw, cursing each time he struck. I tried to cover my face with my arms but he flung them away, pinned them behind me with one hand while he continued to pound with the other. Then I blanked out, the words "You will be shot. Shot!" fading away into a long, dark tunnel that had no end.

I woke up on the floor of a black room, the pain so intense that I could not lift my head. I knew that I was not in the cell with the other girls, but I did not know where I was or what time it was or if it was still the same day. Sleep must have overtaken me again; light was struggling into the tiny cell through a small window high up on one wall. When I raised my head the room began to whirl and a pounding beat against my temples. Again I sank into sleep.

The next time I awoke the crashing inside my head had subsided somewhat. I could sit up without feeling as if I would collapse again, but one eye would not open. Struggling to the window, I looked out with the other eye. The courtyard was spread out before me, snow softly falling on the benches where my father and I had sat together. I was in the basement of the prison. Hanging onto the walls of the room, I made my way around the cell, finding a mat on the floor, a toilet, a sink and a small metal mirror. I looked into the mirror. A lump of swollen flesh looked back at me, everything red, mashed, one eye a mass of broken blood vessels, the other completely swollen shut. Tears welled up behind my eyes but they did not fall.

For two weeks I was locked in that cell, a guard bringing food every night, shoving it in at me without a word. I kept track of the days, of the light coming and fading in the window, of the snow drifting down without a sound, and slept and was afraid, terrified that I would never get out of that cell, that I would never see my mother, my father again.

Then one afternoon I heard creaking sounds in the courtyard. A hand pump not far from my window was making the sound as I watched Mr. Bergman push it up and down. The other men were shambling across the courtyard to the pump, slowly removing their shirts as they came. Evidently it was Sunday

and the prisoners were being allowed to wash themselves. Then my father walked by my window. His back was bloated, bruised, striped with cuts running the entire length, from his neck to his waist. Streaks of dried blood ran along each festering slash. He walked even more bent over than the last time I had seen him and his face was thin, the cheeks sunk into hollows. "Oh, Father," I whispered, tears running like rain down my cheeks.

The next morning a guard opened my cell door and ordered me to follow him. "Either I will be beaten again, now that my face is almost healed, or I will be shot," I thought. However, I was taken back to our cell and told that we were all being taken to a prison in Budapest. First, however, the other girls and I were to go back to our homes, pack up our families and move them somehwere, anywhere we could find, but they could not remain living near the border.

"Oh, Sereń," Mozelle said as soon as the guard had left us for a minute , "we thought maybe you were dead."

"I'm alive!" I said, laughing at first but then stopping when my cheek began to hurt again.

"Why do we have to go back by ourselves?" she asked. "Why can't our fathers go, too?"

"Haven't you seen them?" I asked her. "They don't want anyone to see how our fathers have been beaten."

"But where will we move our families?" Leah asked. "Where can they go? We have no permits to settle anywhere."

"We'll have to see," I said. "We'll just have to see . . . "

The four of us began the long trip back to Valea Uzului accompanied by the same gendarmes who had taken us away from our homes a month before. It

was by now the end of November and bitterly cold. We had fourteen days to return home, find a place for our families to live and come back to the prison at Miercurea-Cuic. If we were not back at the end of the time limit, a warrant would be put out for our arrests and when found, we would be shot. We hurried along, stopping again at farms in the evenings to eat and sleep, and by the end of the fifth day we were only a few miles from Valea Uzului. At the last peasant farm the gendarmes commandeered a horse and wagon to use in moving our families. Then we were at the mill and the gendarmes left us but not before reiterating once more the length of time we had left and what would happen should we fail to return.

As soon as they were out of sight I ran to the house and opened the door. My mother was standing at the stove, stirring a pot absent-mindedly. She looked up, startled at the noise of the door opening and closing. "You!" she exclaimed. She ran to me and held me very tightly. Then she asked, "Where is your father? Is he all right? Where is he?"

"He's in prison . . . in Murcurea Cuic," I answered. "I've been there, too."

"Is he all right?"

"He is . . . "

"Is he all right? Tell me!"

"He could not come. They wouldn't let him. But he's all right--hurt a little, but all right."

She began to cry, pulling me close to her again. I could not tell her about the beatings, about my father becoming a haggard old man almost overnight. She probably sensed it, however, for she cried in my arms for a long while. Then she straightened up and said, "How long can you stay? Are you free now?"

"I can stay for only a little while. I have to be back again by the end of next week."

"Then why did they let you go?"

"To help you move. We can't live here anymore."

"Oh, no! Not that, too!" My mother looked around her kitchen, at the familiar black kettles sitting on the stove, at the long table where we had all gathered on many joyful holidays. "But where can we go?" she asked. "We have nowhere to go!"

"Well, we will have to get a permit somewhere. Maybe we can get one in Reghinal-Sasesk. Herman and Tamara and Eugene and Rose all live there. It would not be so bad if you could live with them."

"No, no . . . it would not be so bad. But my house . . . Is it because we live so near the border?"

"That is what they have said."

"Oh, Sereń, do you think we will ever be allowed to come back here again? Have you heard anything about the war?"

"One day I overheard the guards talking. They said there were plans to resettle all the Jews, to take us to the island of Madagascar. Maybe we will all be sent there eventually. Maybe we will all be together again after the war."

"Yes, perhaps. But still . . . Well, we can only hope for the best. There is nothing else we can do. We better tell Esther and Zipporah and begin to pack."

The next morning we led the horse and wagon from house to house, loading only a trunk or two and a basket at each stop, for there were six families to move: Ira Bergman's wife and two small daughters, Laban Stern's

wife and aged father, Reuben Handler's wife and three little boys, Samuel Mosheh's old, crippled wife and the wife of Nehamias, the doctor, and his two, small sons. Room on the wagon had to be left for the very old and for the very young who would tire easily and need to ride at times.

Finally everything was loaded and we were ready to begin the long journey through the mountains, following the same road I had already traveled twice. Our plan was to walk with the horse and wagon to the town of Murcurea Cuic to see the men in prison. From here the different families would go wherever they could--some to Reghinal-Sasesk with us, some to other cities, all hoping to receive a permit to live there once they arrived.

We set out early one afternoon. On the seat of the wagon were Ira Bergman's wife and two small daughters, the reins grasped tightly in Mrs. Bergman's hands as the horse walked at a slow, clopping gait; behind her old Mr. Stern sat bundled in a large wooden chair while the frail wife of Samuel Mosheh reclined on a pile of quilts. Behind them were the black trunks, the wicker baskets, bundles tied with string and finally, a little nest made of pillows and blankets for the small children who would begin to cry after struggling along for a few miles and want to ride, pretending they were still at home in their warm beds.

I walked beside my mother, Zipporah and Esther, who wept against a box she was carrying in one hand. It contained little trifles--red ribbons, pins, photographs of childhood friends--she could not bear to leave behind. We all carried such things--one a favorite dress, one a silver menorah that had been in the family for generations, another, an extra pair of shoes. As we started away from the house and mill, my mother kept glancing back, taking a few steps forward and then stopping, looking back once more until there was

nothing more to see but the road stretching behind into the forests. She must have known it would be the last time she would ever see her home. It was the last time for all of us.

The journey was hard, slow; the women and children were not used to walking and we had to stop often to rest, to quiet a crying child, to find water and food. We had all brought along what little money we had available to us, the money our fathers once had in the Romanian banks gone to us forever. We bought food and the privilege of staying in barns overnight from the farmers along the way. When the money was gone we exchanged old family jewelry for these necessities. Before we left my mother had given me her emerald ring which I wore on a chain under my dress. She carried all of the other jewelry my father had given her in a silk bag. At one farm a silver chain was traded for food, at another a gold ring.

Snow fell off and on through the cold, November days and then the journey became even more difficult, the wind gusting the flakes into drifts the horse could not struggle through. We helped him along, the women pulling from the sides and the other girls and I pushing from behind until we were through one drift and up against another. We pushed and rested, rested and pushed, the small children climbing up on the wagon to nap and then down again to walk for a way, holding their mothers' hands. Zipporah trudged along beside one girl and then another, chatting all the while. The trip was harder on Esther who was the youngest of the family, who had always been allowed to remain a favored child, to sleep until very late in the morning, to do little work in the house, who now had to sleep in a cold stable and do without even a cup of tea.

Finally we arrived at Murcurea Cuic and hurriedly walked through the

streets my father and the other men were forced to wash each day. The women all hoped to see their husbands once again, but when we arrived at the prison we were told that not only was this impossible but that if we did not find a place to settle immediately we would be arrested and imprisoned. There was nothing left to do but board the train to Reghinal-Sasesk, hoping that Herman or Eugene would be able to secure permits for my mother, Esther and Zipporah. The other families went to different cities, to other relatives, all longing for the same thing--a bed, a stove, a simple room where no one would say, "You are not wanted here!"

When the train stopped at the station and our trunks and baskets were unloaded, I left my mother and sisters at the depot and rushed through the streets asking people I met if they knew the whereabouts of Herman; he, if anyone, would be known in the city as he was always a friend to everyone and everyone a friend to him. As I expected, one of the first persons I asked directed me to the exact apartment number in the building where he lived. I ran back to get my mother and sisters and we reached his apartment building quickly. It was an old brick building surrounded by many other buildings, all looking the same. We climbed the stairs to the apartment and then hesitated before the door.

"Maybe this isn't the right apartment," Esther said. "We might be arrested if we disturb someone."

"We have to take the chance and knock," I answered. "I don't know what else to do."

Then my mother said, "Listen! Listen!" Above the clanging of the streetcars going by, above the chattering of the birds on the roof, could be heard the strums of a guitar and a clear, rich voice lifting up into the air, higher and higher.

"It's Tamara!" Zipporah cried.

"Yes, it's Tamara," my mother said and smiled for the first time since we left home.

We knocked on the door, Tamara came and opened it, welcoming us with her arms spread wide and we were almost home once more.

There were still many difficulties to overcome, however; not only did my mother and sisters have no assurance that they could remain with Herman and Tamara or with Rose and Eugene, but there was almost no place for them to sit down if we did, by some miracle, secure the permits. Herman and Tamara lived with their three near-grown sons, Miksa, Ernie and Joseph, in one room with a small kitchen. Eugene and Rose, who lived in the same building, had even less space for they had five children: Emma, who was fifteen; Alfred, fourteen; Magda, thirteen; and two little girls--Elena, five and Estelle, three. The seven of them all slept in one room, ate in one room, sewed and swept and read and played--all in the one room. When we were trying to decide who should stay with whom, Rose said, "Of course you can all move in with us!" But as she talked her eyes moved about the room, over the piles of bedding in one corner, the boxes of clothing stacked in another corner, the toys and papers and pillows scattered everywhere. Then Estelle began to cry, pulling at Rose's skirt, while Elena tugged at her arm.

It was decided that my mother would stay with Rose and Eugene to help with the children, Zipporah with Herman and Tamara and Esther would be sent to Shlomo in Satu More. Thus each family would be adding only one more person.

That evening Herman came back from the mill outside the city where he and Eugene had managed to secure work, making scarcely enough to feed all of them. He was cheerful, boisterous, welcoming us as if he had a palace with many rooms to offer instead of the small corner of one room.

"I will be able to get permits for you and Zipporah," he told my mother. "Don't worry. We will all be fine!" He was tall and fair, straight as a pine tree, and I felt such sorrow remembering how our father had been the same.

The very next day Herman came home with the permits, as he promised, although I'll never know how he accomplished it, for the police were supposedly not giving out any more to Jews. In the morning Esther and I went back to the station and I waited with her for the train to Satu Mare.

What if Shlomo and his wife don't want me to come?" she asked.

"How can they not want you? You are family! Besides, Shlomo and Zipporah never got along. They are both fireballs. But he has always liked you. Who doesn't?" I teased, reaching up to stroke her cheek, for she was much taller than I was.

She smiled, tentatively. "Will you write to me?"

"Of course."

She waved to me out of the open train window. As I rode a different train back to my father, to prison, that image stayed with me--her hand slowly moving back and forth until it was only a light speck against the long black train receding further and further into the distance.

CHAPTER TEN

Three days after I left my mother and Zipporah in Reghinal-Sasesk, my father and I and the other eight people who were arrested with us were taken from the prison and put on a train to Budapest. It was by now the end of November and winter stretched in an unbroken flow of white over the fields and trees moving by our windows. A penetrating, bitter wind seeped in through the cracks around the windows. Although we fought against it, stamping our feet to keep the blood circulating, moving stiff fingers inside our gloves, pulling our coats tighter, trying to sink into the warmth of the wool, nothing helped. Not even the seats, small, hard benches with no coverings, gave comfort. Sitting on them day after day left us so stiff and sore that any movement became painful. We felt as if our muscles had turned to stone.

Having taken the train many times back and forth between Bucharest and home, I expected the discomfort and brought along a pillow for my father. I knew that he would be too tall to curl up on the bench like the others did. No matter how much he seemed to have withered in the past two months, he was still a large man. As soon as we pulled out of Murcurea Cuic I slid the pillow behind his back as he sat, eyes closed, head down, still.

"Here, Father," I said. "I brought this for you."

He opened his eyes and looked at me intently, asking silently, "Have you seen the wounds on my back that I've tried so hard to keep hidden from you?"

"I want you to be comfortable," I quickly said. "I don't need a pillow."

"Thank you, Seren," he said, his eyes still looking into mine. Then he lay back, whispered, his white hair falling against his face, "I'm getting old . . . so old . . . "

I clasped one of his hands in mine and sat quietly, staring out into the passing fields.

For eight days we traveled through Transylvania. Each afternoon or early evening the train pulled into the outskirts of another city, slowed, eased into the station, each one looking much like all the others before it. Only the name of the city printed in big letters above the depot changed. Brasov gave way to Sighisoara and was followed in turn by Blaj, Alba Lulia, Deva, Lipora and Arad. It made no difference except that the name of each new city meant that we were being taken further and further away from the rest of our families without knowing when we would see them again. Every time we reached a new city the Hungarian gendarmes who were accompanying us handed us over to the local police who kept us either for a few hours or overnight in the city jail.

The ten of us did not speak among ourselves; there were other, Gentile passengers, and each of us seemed lost in thought, too afraid to voice the fears that kept running through our heads in time to the rhythms of the clacking rails beneath the train. Once or twice I tried to say a few words to Nehamias, the doctor, who had been kind to me whenever I was home for a visit. Now he sat alone, his wife and small children left behind. I knew he must be worried about them just as I was about my mother, Zipporah and Esther. Often he sat quite still, staring at his hands. I had looked at them in quick glances when I thought he would not notice. They were dark red and mottled with shiny purple splotches, the fingers twisted in stiff knots.

One day he suddenly began to speak to me as if I had appeared to him in a dream. "Did you know that each country has its favorite method of torture?" he asked, his voice quiet, the words coming out slowly, carefully.

I looked at him, knowing that he must have suffered as much as my father and I.

"The Chinese once used the water torture, the French the rack. Do you know what the Hungarians do that is unique?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"They place an egg in boiling water, leaving it in until it has absorbed as much heat as possible. Then they quickly flip it out into a man's hand. They close his hand over it and hold it closed while the heat burns into the flesh in one, long sear. When the egg has cooled they replace it in the boiling water and repeat the process on the other hand. Once the hands are so badly burned that they will no longer open, they place the steaming egg under the soft flesh of the arm pit."

He stopped abruptly, and closed his eyes. The restless hands trembled in his sleep.

It became progressively more difficult to rest as the train continued across Transylvania. We were given a hot meal only at night when we reached the local jail. All during the day we felt like our insides had turned to ice while the benches grew even harder.

Finally one night when we did not get off the train to rest, I sank to the floor in front of the bench on which my father was sitting and leaned my head against his legs, hoping to find some ease. My father was still wearing the heavy, fur-lined boots he wore at the mill. I was grateful for

that. The boots looked dear and familiar; I remembered how Zipporah, Eliezer and I used to wait anxiously long ago for my father to come in at night so we could pull them off. We fussed about it so much that he finally assigned turns: Eliezer, one night; Zipporah, the next; I, the third. Once the heavy boots were off and set behind the stove to dry, he pressed a coin into the hand of whomever had pulled them off that day. When I had my turn I ran to get his house slippers, holding the coin against my cheek all the way to the bedroom and back. Then my father would laugh at the big, circular indentation the coin left on my face. Now I had not heard him laugh for months. Patting his leg softly, I fell asleep.

In the morning when I awoke I stood up, stretched and sat down beside my father who was watching me. "Did you sleep?" I asked.

"Very little." He paused, still looking at me. "Sereń," he finally said, "last night while you slept I saw the sores behind your ears . . . the oozing. They pulled your hair until the skin cracked, didn't they?"

His voice was so full of grief that I wanted to say, "But you suffered even more! Your back is one massive wound." I said nothing, not wanting to add to his grief by acknowledging that I knew the extent of his pain. At least he could believe that he had spared his child the sorrow of seeing him so wounded, vulnerable.

"I want to tell you, Sereń," he continued, "that I'm sorry I didn't let you go to Palestine when you had the chance. I'm very . . . " His voice broke. He looked out at the snow, at the whiteness flying by the windows.

"It's all right," I answered quickly. "I could have gone if I had really wanted to go. I didn't want to leave Mama. I couldn't bear the thought of leaving her. I wanted to stay more than I wanted to go."

My father's eyes filled with tears. He did not let them overflow. "I can see now," he went on so softly that I had to strain to hear the words, "that I won't be able to keep the family whole like I have always planned. We're being taken from each other, one by one. We'll never be together again." He closed his eyes, reached for my hand, held it tightly in both of his. During the remainder of the trip he said nothing.

On the eighth day after leaving Murcurea Cuic the train reached the old border between Hungary and Translyvania. The gendarmes who had accompanied us across Transylvania handed us over to the Hungarian police who would take us the rest of the way to Budapest. While the other girls and I had previously stayed together in one big room, this time each of us was put in a separate room. I did not understand what was happening, what was the reason for this isolation, yet in the back of my mind I knew that the gendarmes would not leave until morning. I had sensed their eyes on the other girls and me during the long days and nights on the train. Not adventurous like the younger men who had rushed off to join the German army, these men were old and fat. They repulsed me.

During the night I neither got undressed nor went to sleep, sitting on my bed hour after hour, listening. Finally, long after midnight, I heard heavy footsteps coming toward my door and a key chain rattling with each approaching step. Quickly I ran to the window and checked it, finding it unlocked. I opened it, climbed up on the sill and jumped down the two stories, landing on my feet but then losing my balance and toppling over on the cement, scraping my leg. Looking around hurriedly, I saw that I was very close to a coal chute leading to the basement of the building. I slid down the chute onto a pile of coal, the air musty and pitch black, unable to see absolutely anything, not

hearing anything except the galloping of my heart. Finally, realizing that no one was coming after me, I curled up on the coal and went to sleep.

In the morning the new guards came looking for me and found me there, smudged and chilly. The gendarmes were gone. I do not know what happened to Ruth, Mozelle and Leah during the night; I never asked them and they did not tell me. While none of us could prevent suffering, each of us could at least save the other from the added burden of another's sorrow. We gave by denying our own needs to share pain. It was all we had to give at the time.

When we were put back on the train we soon discovered that while we thought the first part of the trip had been insufferable, the remaining part would be even more difficult. Now that we were in Hungary proper, the other, regular passengers were Hungarian rather than Transylvanian. While the Transylvanians did not respect us and tried to avoid any close contact with us, they did not seem to hate us. This was not so with the Hungarians.

The other prisoners, my father and I were still in a compartment at the front of the train in a car that had no toilet. This, a problem in itself, was compounded by the fact that when one of us had to use the toilet all ten of us had to go along, accompanied there and back by guards. They marched us through the entire length of the train past all the other passengers to the toilet on the last car. One of the guards must have gone ahead of us to announce our coming for upon entering each car we were confronted by men and women lined up on both sides of the aisle, their mouths drawn down, eyes hard and cold. As we walked by them each one did something to us: one kicked at our legs, one spat at our faces, one punched on our backs and still another called out, "Dirty Jews! Filthy, rotten Jews!"

It was so with each car, all the way to the end of the train. When

we returned it was the same, trip after trip, day after day, until my legs were bruised, my face slimy from the spit. I thought of my mother's sweet-smelling soap and wondered if I would ever have the luxury of using it again.

One of the worst of these tormentors was an enormous Hungarian woman who was in the last days of pregnancy, her belly greatly swollen and bulging from her coat. Every time we passed this woman she held up her two small children, one in each arm. The little girl spat at us and the boy flailed his feet constantly into each passing arm. Their mother urged them on, crying, "Vermin! Vermin! Vermin!" Both my arms were soon black and blue.

The days passed by slowly, slowly, the train inching across the vast plains of Hungary, great desert-like stretches of nothing but snow and sky for as far as one could see. On the thirteenth night we again stayed on the train as it continued on through the long, lonely stretches of countryside. In the evening one of the men, Mr. Handler, had to use the toilet; he had restrained himself all day, as we all had to save ourselves from the tormenting trip through the train, but he could wait no longer. In the first two cars we were kicked and abused as usual, but when we entered the third car, no one was lined up. The passengers were all huddled around the pregnant woman who was wailing and thrashing, throwing her arms high up into the air, her voice moaning loudly above the roar of the train. She was in the last stages of labor. An old woman was wiping her brow, another quieting her children, but there was no sign of a doctor or a midwife.

A short while after we returned to our compartment, one of the Hungarian policemen came up to us and asked, "Which one of you is the doctor?"

"There's no doctor here," Nehamias said softly.

"Don't lie to me! It says on my papers that one of you swine is a doctor. Now which one is it?"

"I was a doctor once," continued Nehamias, "but no more. I am no more . . . ." He held up his hands briefly and then let them fall into his lap.

"Well, see if you can do something, pig! That woman's having her kid. She's yelling her damn head off. See if you can shut her up!" With that he grabbed Nehamias by the back of his jacket and shoved him out of the compartment and down the aisle.

We sat there for several quiet hours, each lost in thought as the wheels rolled relentlessly on through the darkness. Finally Nehamias came back and sank onto the bench. He said nothing for a long time, staring out into the blackness.

"She's dead," he finally announced to no one in particular. "She died. The baby, too. There was nothing I could do."

He lapsed back into silence and finally, into sleep. His hands flew to his face once, twice, and then were still.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The next morning we awoke to find ourselves in Budapest. As soon as the train came to a full stop we were ordered to get out and line up at the far end of the station. Our bodies were half turned to wood from the days of sitting on the hard seats and walking was painful.

After several hours we came to a high fence of barbed wire, and beyond, a grouping of buildings barely visible in the dreary, gray light of late December. Shivering, the sleet blowing at us on a strong north wind, we stood at the gate to this prison, which we would later come to know as Kistarcha, for an hour, two, until finally we were led to our new cells, one for the men and another for the other girls and me.

Again we were interrogated, accused of being spies, threatened. This time, however, it seemed to be merely a formality, for at the end of the second day a Hungarian guard came to us and said, "Get out! We don't want you here, you filthy pigs. Get out!"

"We are free?" I asked.

"Can't you hear? I said to get out, didn't I?"

"Oh, I can't wait to see my father. He will be so happy that we can go back to Transylvania," Mozelle cried.

"Who said anything about the men?" the guard asked. "They're staying. This is a men's prison. We don't allow Jew whores. Get out! Get out! Get out!"

He came at us with his gun raised. Quickly we put on our coats, running to the door with only a button or two fastened and our scarves trailing behind us. Once outside we ran until we were at the gate, the soldier chasing after us, and rushed through it and out into the countryside, the fields barren and brown under a light coating of snow. Then we stopped, realizing that we had been forced to leave without saying good-bye to our fathers, without seeing them at all. One by one we walked back to the fence, hoping to catch a glimpse of them. We saw them, marching across the prison grounds, surrounded on all sides by soldiers.

"Where do you think they are taking them?" asked Leah.

"Probably to a barracks," Ruth answered. "See, they are turning in at that low building over there."

"Our poor fathers. Do you think we will ever see them again?" Leah asked.

"They have to let them write to us," I answered. Still, a pain was spreading across my chest as the men disappeared from view. Still, I wanted to run back through the gate, hurry to my father, hold on to my father.

Mozelle began to cry. "What are we going to do?" she sobbed. We are in the middle of nowhere, so far from home. We don't even have a home. What are we going to do?"

"We could go to our mothers if we had some money," said Leah. "But how can we? We have nothing. And if we stay here the Hungarian soldiers will arrest us again."

"My mother gave me an emerald ring," I said, pulling it out from under my dress where it hung on a chain. "Let's walk back to Budapest. I'll sell it there and we'll all have enough money to buy train tickets."

We walked back to the city where I sold the ring and we boarded the train once more, riding the long, long miles in reverse, wondering if we would ever see our fathers again. I also wondered how I could manage to find work; I kept seeing in my mind the piled-up boxes and bedding, the chairs and tables that overwhelmed the tiny room Rose and her family were sharing with my mother. I wanted to move her and Zipporah in with me to a place of our own. If I could find someone who needed sewing done, I could earn some money and the three of us would not have to be dependent on Herman and Rose.

When I arrived I went quickly to Herman and Tamara's room.

"Sereń, you're back!" Tamara said. "How wonderful! Have they let you go?"

"Yes, but not my father."

"Oh, I'm so sorry . . . but at least you're here. You can stay with us, too. We'll have a nice time together! I've invited some friends over tonight to sing with me. You'll like them!"

"No. No. I am going to find a place for my mother, Zipporah and me. You hardly have room for yourselves here."

"We want you to stay! The more people there are around, the better I like it! It makes me forget about the war," she answered.

"I simply can't impose on you. We have some jewelry left. We'll sell a few pieces and I'll find a place with the money from them."

"But what will you do when that money runs out?"

"I'll find work. Surely someone will hire me. I acquired a lot of experience in Bucharest," I said.

"No one is hiring anyone! Herman and Eugene are lucky that they have

found work at the mill. All of the Jewish women who might have once hired you to sew for them are now afraid to spend any money. No one knows what will happen. They're holding on to their money if they still have some. And all of the Jewish shops are closed." She smiled at me then and pulled out her guitar. "Please stay with us. I'll sing for you. Zipporah comes and goes so much that she is little company."

"Thank you for asking me, but I can't," I answered.

"At least stay until you find a place then."

"All right."

"Good! Now listen to this new song a friend taught me."

She sang a song about spring and the blossoming flowers, sang until I had almost forgotten that my father was in prison, our home gone, Eliezer perhaps dead and the rest of the family broken apart and scattered.

Early the next morning I began trudging up and down the streets of Reghinal-Sasesk, looking for a room to rent. On building after building there were no vacancies listed and when I did manage to speak to a landlord, he told me that he had long waiting lists and I might as well abandon hope of finding a vacant room. For days I continued to look, inquiring wherever I went, but no one had even heard of a vacancy. Finally one morning when I was walking along a street of old family dwellings, thinking that perhaps someone had recently decided to rent out a room, I saw an elderly Jewish woman tacking a notice to her door. I walked up to her and asked, "May I see the room?"

She glanced at me quickly, frightened. "Why would you want to rent from me?" she asked, her eyes darting from my hair to my face and back again.

"It's all right," I said, realizing that she had mistaken me for a Gentile. "I'm also Jewish. I need a room for my mother and sister and me."

"Come on then," she said quickly and turned to go inside.

I followed her into the very small, wooden house, wondering where she was hiding the extra room. She led me to the second of two rooms and opened the door. "Here it is," she said, beckoning me with her hand. Hurriedly I walked in and then stopped abruptly. Peeling green paint hung from the ceiling, from the walls, curled along the window sills revealing a deep gray under-paint. A small window on the far wall was broken in one corner and stuffed with a dusty, brown gunny sack. The room itself was bare; not a chair or rug or even a bed stood on the worn floor.

"Doesn't it come with furniture?" I asked.

"No, I don't have any. And I have no money to buy some. But you can use the kitchen," she said. I remembered seeing an ice box, an old iron stove and a table with two small chairs at one end of the other room. "I don't need it," she continued. "My daughter lives next door and I eat my meals with her."

It would have to do, I decided, and gave the woman enough money for the first month's rent.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm a widow. It's become very hard for me to get along. This will help out some." Timidly she smiled at me and closed the door.

The next day I came back with two benches that Rose and Eugene were not using and some weathered boards that Herman found at the mill. Placing the boards across the benches, I made a bed and covered it with straw-filled sacks. Tamara had given me some pillows, and Rose, some sheets. I made up the bed and stood back to look; it was a rough, hard, sparse bed, but it was a bed.

Once I swept the floor, I was ready to move my mother and Zipporah out of their crowded places.

That evening we came back with our few clothes--an extra dress each and several pairs of stockings. Zipporah took one, quick look at the room. "You don't expect me to stay in this, do you?" she asked. "It's a hovel!"

"It's not so bad," my mother said.

"Not bad? There isn't even any furniture! I'm going back to Herman and Tamara's," she yelled and started walking towards the door.

"I looked and looked! There isn't anything else!" I shouted. "You shouldn't stay with Herman any longer. We've imposed on them long enough!"

"I'll ask him," she answered. "He won't mind. He's my brother!"

"He wouldn't say no if he did mind. He's too tender-hearted."

"But he doesn't mind. I'm not staying here!" She marched to a box in the corner and sat down.

Too exhausted to answer, I crawled into the makeshift bed. My mother, who had given up arguing with Zipporah long ago, followed me. Zipporah remained on the box, arms folded across her chest, saying over and over, "I'm not staying . . . I'm not staying." Finally, after several hours, she lay across the bottom of the bed and fell asleep.

In the morning Zipporah left for Herman's one-room apartment, my mother busied herself in the kitchen and I set out to find work. I decided to look first in the salons which were small and not at all luxurious like those in Bucharest where I had worked, but I was not looking for elegance. Many of the shops were closed, the word "Juden" written across the door in large, red letters. On one salon a notice was posted: "Wer beim Juden kauft ist ein Volksverrater" (Whoever buys from a Jew is a traitor to his

people). The street where most of the Jewish shops had been were deserted, strewn with broken chairs and tables, broken boards. Shattered windows were scattered over the cobblestones, the persistent clacking of an unhinged shutter rising above the howling of the cold wind.

That night my mother and I had nothing to eat for supper. We sat over tea, warming our hands on the hot cups, and tried to ignore the rumblings of our stomachs. "I will find work," I told my mother. "It takes time."

"I know you will," she answered. "A little fasting never hurt anyone."

"Herman and Rose have so little. I don't want to ask them for food. If they give it to us they will be taking it away from Miksa, Ernie and Joseph."

"I know. I know . . . But we'll be all right. I've never seen you give up on anything once you decide you want it," she said laughing, squeezing my cheek.

The next day I went from door to door, asking if there was any sewing that I might do, receiving the same answer over and over: "I need a dress but I don't want to spend any money now. I'll make do with what I have." Then, late in the day, I came to a house set back from the street on top of a hill. Below the house spread a wide yard with two wooden sheds on one side. When I rang the doorbell, a tall, thin old man came to the door. "Well?" he said in an impatient voice.

"I'm looking for work," I answered. "I'm a seamstress . . . a good one!" I smiled at him as if my heart were not racing, my palms perspiring.

"Can you make men's shirts?" he asked.

"Of course," I said, even though I had never in my life sewn anything for a man.

"I have a commission to make shirts for the army and I do need someone. But I can't pay you very much. In fact, the pay is almost nothing . . . two forints per shirt."

"I'll take the job," I answered.

"Fine. When can you start?"

"Tomorrow."

"Good. I'll see you then," he said, closing the door. I had a job!

Early the next morning my new employer brought out bolts of dark material and two sewing machines, instructing me to follow him to the bottom of the hill to one of the small shacks I had noticed the day before. "This isn't fit to live in," he said, "or I would have rented it out. But you can sew here, can't you?"

"Yes, certainly," I answered quickly.

"Here's the shirt you're to make and you have the cloth. There's some thread up in the house. I'll bring it down to you."

"Fine."

He left me with the treadle machines, a dusty, cold shed, piles of cloth and a shirt for which I had no pattern. I did not even have a work table. Looking around, I found two saw horses and an old table top in the corner and there, after a little dusting, was my cutting board. Setting up a machine on another old table, I began to unravel the seams of the shirt. Once I had it all apart, I had my pattern. When my employer brought down the thread, I was cutting, he was pleased, and by the end of the day I had completed several shirts.

A week later I came home to our room to find Esther sitting at the table with my mother. A few days before Shlomo had been arrested by the

Hungarian police and taken away. My mother was heartbroken. "Shlomo, Shlomo," she cried to herself. "First it was Eliezer and then your father and now, you. When will it end?"

"What happened to his wife and baby?" I asked. "Surely they were not taken, too?"

"They have moved in with her parents," Esther answered. "I didn't want to stay with them. They have barely enough to eat themselves. So I came back here."

"I'm glad you came back to us," I said. "We've all missed you. And we have our own room now. You can stay here. You can even work. I have a job and my employer could use another seamstress."

"But I don't know how to be a seamstress. I've never sewn one seam!" she cried.

"It's not so hard. Will you try?" I asked.

"I would like to work with you . . . if you think I can do it."

"Wonderful! You'll learn quickly. I'm a good teacher," I laughed, hugging her. At least I had my little sister back again.

The next day I took Esther to work with me and taught her how to cut out the shirts; she cut and I sewed. She learned so quickly that my employer asked me if I could find another girl to work and I thought of Emma, Rose's eldest daughter. She was fifteen, two years younger than Esther, and glad to have the chance of earning money to help her family. Very soon the three of us were working together. Every night we had enough money to buy a few groceries for our dinner, sometimes nothing more than a potato or two, but we did not go hungry.

We worked throughout the winter of 1942. I managed to pay our rent

on time every month. We would have been relatively content, if one could call it that, had it not been for the knowledge that our father was still in prison without any hope of being released and continuing to deteriorate. In the beginning, in December, he wrote clear, logical letters asking about the family or telling about the condition of the other men with him. After a month he began to seem confused, asking about events that had happened long ago. "Have you heard from Herman?" he wrote. "Tell him I forbid him to desert the army again." Another time he asked me to speak with the foreman at the mill about shipping a load of lumber to Bulgaria. Each time I received a letter I was afraid to open it, afraid that it would not be from the man I knew to be my father but from someone living in a reality of his own creation. At the end of January my fears materialized; we received a letter from the prison authorities stating that my father had suffered a nervous breakdown and had been sent to the mental institution in Budapest.

Passover came in the late spring that year. When Esther and I sat down at the table with our mother, the rich aroma of roasting goose did not waft through the air nor did we have the comforting smell of soup simmering on the stove. No silver goblets, no fine tablecloths, no bottles of red wine gleaming in the candlelight graced our table. We did not have so much as the bitter herbs or the charoset. Rather, a potato and one egg were on the plate in front of our mother, Esther and I pooling our money to buy them. Our mother sat, eyes brimming, talking of those missing from her at this time of year when previously every single child and grandchild had been so near that she could reach out and touch them. She found it very hard to eat the food before her, since there was no money left to buy some for ourselves, but we

kept urging her until she did. At one point I heard the old widow come into the house and quickly ran to close the door to our room so that she would not see how we did not have one piece of matzoth.

After the meal Esther and my mother began to wash the few dishes. I went to our room to read the letter from my father that had arrived earlier. The handwriting on the envelope was more irregular than usual, moving up and down in little waves. "Who will be speaking to me this time?" I wondered. Hesitantly, I opened the letter:

Dear Seren,

When are you coming home from Bucharest again? Of course, you will come for Passover. Your mother is busy baking in preparation for the holiday. This morning she told me that she is going to make the matzos.

The man next to me calls out all day long. The nights are long. Your brother, Eliezer, comes and goes. I am tired. The mill demands a lot of a man. At night the guards take away our blankets. It is cold. I will try to finish my business here soon and be back home by the time the violets bloom.

Your father

Refolding the letter carefully, I placed it back in the envelope and put it with the other letters in a box under the bed. I imagined walking to the train station, boarding the first train to Budapest, running to the prison, to his cell. I looked in my change purse as if I did not know what was there--nothing, not a single pengö. I climbed into bed. "Maybe if I work harder," I thought, "I can save enough to buy a ticket to see my father." Planning the number of shirts I would sew the next day, I fell asleep.

The following week passed quickly: needle in, up and down on the treadle, needle out, clip the threads, turn the seam, needle in. Again it was Shabat and then Saturday afternoon. Often one of Esther's friends came to our room or Zipporah took time out from her daily gatherings with her friends to visit us. I often sewed on work I had brought home with me while

chatting with my mother. On this particular afternoon Zipporah came bursting into the little kitchen, her face flushed from the cold, a bright red scarf thrown over one shoulder.

"Mama!" she yelled. "Where are you? I want you to meet someone!"

My mother came running from our room where she had been resting. "I'm here! Who is it?"

"You'll see. Just wait a minute." She dashed outside and came back almost immediately, pulling along a young man who was so tall he had to duck when he came in through the door.

"Mama, this is Samuel Stein," she said, smiling up at him.

"I am very pleased to meet you," my mother said.

Samuel held out his hand and took my mother's in his. "I can see who Zipporah can thank for her beauty," he said.

"Oh, such a flatterer, Zipporah! Where did you have the good fortune of meeting him?" my mother asked.

"At Herman and Tamara's. Samuel's brother, Joshua, is a friend of Herman's," she answered. "Isn't Samuel handsome?"

He was. Even I, who usually had no patience or time for Zipporah's friends, had to admit that he was quite attractive. His hair was dark, curling softly about his face, his back broad, body lean and muscular.

"And who are you?" he asked suddenly, turning to me.

"Oh, this is my sister, Seren," Zipporah said. "My older sister."

He held out his hand. "Another beauty! Your hair is wonderful! I have always loved long, golden hair. And whom do you take after?" he asked me.

I looked up at him, not sure if he was sincere. "Our father, I guess."

"How lucky you girls are--both so lovely!" he said.

"Well, we're on our way to see another friend," Zipporah said quickly. "Your house was on the way so we stopped in. Goodbye, Mama. I'll see you again soon." They were out the door and gone in half a minute.

"That Zipporah!" my mother laughed. "She has a good time no matter what!"

Late Monday afternoon Esther, Emma and I finished our sewing for the day and came out into the early evening light, climbing the hill to our employer's house to deliver the shirts we had completed.

"Ah, what a day!" Emma said. "How many shirts did we cut out today, anyway?"

"Seventeen," Esther answered.

"Seventeen! No wonder my hand feels like it is ready to fall off."

"Look!" said Esther. "A man is coming up the hill after us. Isn't he Zipporah's friend, Samuel?"

"Yes, I believe he is," I said. "I wonder why he's here. You don't think something has happened to Zipporah, do you?" I ran back down to him. "Where's Zipporah? Is she all right?"

"She is fine," he answered. "She's at Herman's."

"Oh, I thought perhaps she was arrested and you came to tell us," I said.

"No, she's fine. I came to see you," he answered.

"Me?"

"Yes. Are you so surprised?"

"Why have you come to see me?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You are Zipporah's friend."

"Can't I be your friend, too?"

"I suppose."

"Good! May I see you home?"

"I suppose."

"Do you also suppose that you could accompany me along the riverbank tomorrow evening. I want you to see the lights shining on the water."

"Well . . . if you are here after work, I suppose."

He laughed, a rich laugh coming from deep within his chest.

Samuel was back the next night and the night after that and all the rest of the nights during that week. We walked along the river, along the quiet streets, along the fields at the edge of the city stretching out under the distant stars. The thought of having someone intelligent and pleasant to talk with at the end of the day made the work go even faster.

The days began to grow warmer, the lilacs to bloom. The three of us worked throughout the balmy days. On Saturday evenings everyone often went to Herman and Tamara's where spring blossomed indoors in the laughing songs of Tamara. She invited to their room one woman she met in the market, another she saw across the courtyard. Herman brought home men from the mill. Together they filled the room with people until we were almost sitting in each other's laps. Then Tamara was happy. Then she sang until her voice was hoarse and it was late in the evening and we were all yawning and falling asleep.

On one of these evenings Tamara came up to me during a pause from her singing. She was wearing a jacket I had sewn for her several years ago. Made of beige and brown plaid wool, it hung a little looser on her now than it had when we all had enough to eat. However, the tailored cut of the jacket, the slight flaring about the hips, still flattered her full figure.

"You still wear that jacket?" I asked.

"Of course! I love it, especially since you made it for me. Oh," she went on, squeezing my hand in both of hers, "I have something exciting to tell you!"

"What?" I asked.

"Samuel is in love with you. He wants to marry you!"

"This is exciting?"

"Yes! He is so handsome, so fine. Don't you agree?"

"He is pleasant," I answered.

"Pleasant?"

"Pleasant."

"But he wants to marry you! Is that all you can say?"

"Why did he tell you this? Why didn't he tell me?" I asked.

"He says that you are always talking of work, work, and nothing but work! He didn't know whether you really cared about him or not. So he asked me what I thought you would say if he asked you to marry him. I said that any girl would be very lucky to have him for a husband."

"Not this girl. I have no time to even think about getting married!"

"No time? How can you not have time to get married? You're already twenty-four years old, if you'll forgive me for saying so. Many girls younger than you have been married for years. I was practically a child when I married your brother."

"I realize that. But I have to work! Who will feed my mother if I can't? I will not ask you and Herman to help us. You have too little to share. And why should you? I am perfectly capable of working. I enjoy working."

"This is all fine, but how can you turn down a good man like Samuel? Besides, if you marry him he can provide for you and your mother."

"I can't depend on that! Look what happened to my father, to Shlomo, to many other men."

"Well, it might not happen to Samuel. He might not be arrested and taken away."

"But then again, he might. I just don't feel like becoming engaged. It's the last thing on my mind! The war is growing, we have very little to eat and my father is far away in prison. I worry about him more and more each day . . . I simply can't become engaged to Samuel or to anyone now."

Tamara had been listening with an impatient expression on her face, one hand on her hip. Now she picked up her guitar and half turned away from me. "Well, there's no talking to you!" she said. With quick, determined steps she walked back to her friends on the other side of the room. For the rest of the evening she ignored me.

The attempts to persuade me to marry Samuel did not cease, however. They were renewed with great enthusiasm the next time I saw Tamara. She also enlisted the aid of everyone we knew in Reghinal-Sasesc: Herman, Rose, Eugene, my cousins, my mother, Samuel's brother. I could go nowhere without someone sing-songing in a sweet, condescending voice, "Samuel is such a fine, young man," or someone else saying, "He's a good man, that Samuel!"

Zipporah, however, was far from pleased at losing Samuel as one of her boyfriends and glared at me while the others were encouraging me to become his fiancé. One Sunday afternoon as my mother and I were sitting quietly together, she mending one of Esther's dresses and I sewing on some shirts I

had brought home from work, Zipporah suddenly opened the door from the outside and came into the kitchen, alone.

"Hello, Mama," she said quickly, her voice tight, contained.

Before our mother could answer, Zipporah turned to me, her dark eyes narrowed. "I want you to stop seeing Samuel!" she said, still standing by the door. "I mean it, Sereń!" With a quick toss of her head she swung her long, black hair behind one shoulder like a young bay mare. Looking directly into my eyes again she asked, "Do you understand?"

"Samuel has been coming to see me," I answered. "I haven't been going to . . . "

"He's mine!" she interrupted. "He was mine long before he even saw you! I will not let you take him away from me."

"Zipporah, I never intended to take him away from you. He was just there one day when I finished working. He asked if he could see me home. Can I help it if he enjoys my company more than yours? Besides, look at all the men you stole from me at the mill dances. When I asked you not to, you said, 'I'll do whatever I like.'"

"You heard her, Mama!" Zipporah shouted. "You see how mean she is to me!"

"Zipporah, Zipporah . . . " my mother answered, sighing deeply. "You have so many friends. Samuel wants to marry your sister. He talks of nothing else to me. Couldn't you be happy for her?"

"Happy for her?" Zipporah asked. "When she steals my boyfriend right from under my nose? I knew you would take sides with Sereń! She's always been your favorite just because she wants to work all day like an old washer-woman and I want to have a little fun once in a while. Well, see if I care!

I'll find a man ten times better than Samuel. You wait and see!"

She turned and rushed into the street, slamming the door behind her. For a few seconds my mother and I listened to the sounds of the door reverberating in the cold, still air. Then I burst out, "I can't stand her sometimes! Who does she think she is--coming in here and ordering me around! And the way she talks to you is outrageous!"

My mother sat silent, staring at the needle she held between her thumb and finger, sliding it in and out of the cloth without pulling it through. "She doesn't hurt my feelings," she finally said. "She is how she is. She's Zipporah. . . . "

After a few more minutes my mother put on some water for tea. We sewed late into the quiet afternoon until the light was gone and darkness clouded in at the single window.

At work Esther and Emma began to talk constantly of Budapest as rumors of deportation steadily grew stronger. We knew we would not be allowed to remain in Reghinal-Sasesc much longer and feared we would be resettled in another country. The only hope of remaining in Hungary was to escape to Budapest whose Jewish population was large and intermingled with the rest of the population. Jews made up the majority of the middle class and were almost indispensable to the economy; they were still free to live where they pleased and could come and go as they liked.

One day Esther came to me and said, "All of my friends have gone to Budapest. Couldn't we go, too?"

"But what about our work?" I answered. "I can't leave this job. I don't know if I'll get another one."

"Well, could Emma and I go then?" she asked.

"Do you really want to go?"

She hesitated, looking down at her hands for a long moment. Finally she looked at me again. "Yes," she answered softly. "It's not that I want to leave you and Mama. You know that, don't you? I'm so frightened living here! I would feel safer in Budapest."

"Let's see if we can scrape together some money then," I answered. "I've been saving for a train ticket to visit Father. But if you live in Budapest you can see him all the time. I'll stay with Mama."

It was decided: Esther and Emma would leave as soon as possible. When Rose heard of their plans she was reluctant at first to let Emma leave, for she was still a young girl of fifteen. However, Rose knew that Emma would be safer in Budapest so she gave in and the tickets were purchased.

On a warm April afternoon, a Saturday, we all gathered at Rose and Eugene's tiny room to say goodbye to the two of them. Rose stood looking at her daughter for a long time without letting fall the tears welling in her eyes. Finally she said, "Eugene, could you take a picture of them before they go? It's almost time to leave for the station."

Eugene found the little camera they still owned buried inside one of the boxes packed in the corner of the room. He ushered us all outside into the late afternoon light slanting across the roof tops, across the streets. "Come on, you two!" he ordered in a pretend, stern voice. "Over by this wall. Now!"

"You, too," Esther called to me. "Come and be in the picture with us. You're wearing my favorite dress!"

I stood between them, my sister and my cousin, our arms around each other's waists. "How can I give them up?" I thought.

Herman and Tamara's tall, gangling sons, Miksa, Ernie and Joseph, were all there, pointing at us and laughing to each other. "The three little tailors . . . " Joseph called out.

"The three giant lumberjacks . . . " Emma called back.

"Silence!" Eugene ordered.

The photograph was taken, the gathering ended. Emma and Esther took the train to Budapest.

A week later Esther sent a letter with the good news that a woman who owned a small lingerie business had hired them to sew for her. "It's much better here," she wrote. "There are so many inter-marriages that almost everyone is part-Jewish. I wish you could come, too."

While I considered the possibility of joining them, I could not bear to leave my mother alone in our tiny room. The thought of being free of Tamara's continued attempts to convince me to marry Samuel, however, was nearly enough to persuade me to leave Reghinal-Sasesc. "How can you let him go?" she asked me over and over, interspersing this question with "Why don't you listen to your sister-in-law who is older and wiser than you?" and "Don't you want a little happiness for yourself?"

Finally, she had a new approach: "Seren," she said one day, "I have another reason, the best reason, why you should marry Samuel."

We were sitting together, I sewing and she strumming on her guitar.

"Don't you want to hear the reason?" she asked.

"No," I answered, continuing to sew.

"You're impossible! I'll tell you anyway. Herman, who is friends with the police; as you know, has it on good authority that all single women will be arrested soon. The government is setting up a labor force for Jewish

women like they have now for Jewish men. But the labor force will only be for single women, not married ones. How can you refuse to get married now?"

"I don't want to get married!" I answered. "Why can't I make you understand such a simple idea? Besides, I wouldn't marry anyone just to get out of something."

"Sereń," she said then, stopping her strumming and taking me by the shoulders, "you know that I won't let you have any peace until you agree to marry Samuel. I only want the best for you. I want to see you married."

Deep within me I knew that, stubborn as I was, she was even more persistent; she would not let the matter rest until I gave in. The bickering was wearing me out. "All right," I said. "You win. I'll marry Samuel."

"Oh! Oh!" she exclaimed jumping up and down, hugging me, twirling me round and round the tiny kitchen. "I'm so happy for you! I can't wait to tell Herman!"

The very next night Samuel was waiting for me after work, his face shining with joy. "Herman has told me the wonderful news, dear Sereń," he said softly. "You have made me overflowing with happiness." His eyes were quickly filling with tears.

"Oh, well . . . " I stammered, at a complete loss for words.

"I've brought you something," he whispered. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a wide, gold band and slipped it on my finger. "There," he said with a deep sigh. "Now we're officially engaged. I can't wait to get married! How soon can the wedding be, my beautiful Sereń?"

"Oh, not for a long time," I answered quickly.

"But why?" he asked, his face crumbling.

"It's not that I don't want to marry you," I answered. "You're a good man, a decent man . . . "

"And you are a treasure!"

"But I'm very busy now. I have a job and I must take care of my mother . . . These things take time."

"Of course. But I won't let you take too long!"

"Yes . . . well . . . I've had a very long day. I think I'll go to bed early tonight." We were still standing at the foot of the hill below my employer's house.

"If you must," he answered, coming closer. "I'll walk you home."

I began to walk very quickly, running at times, almost leaving Samuel far behind. At last I reached our door. "Good night," I called back to Samuel, gasping down the sidewalk a few yards behind me, and escaped inside. Feigning a headache, I hurriedly undressed and climbed into bed before my mother could see the ring. As I pulled the covers over my head, burrowing deep down beneath them, I wondered, "What in the world have I let myself in for now?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

One week later my employer ran out of shirt material and could not obtain any more; I was dismissed. Immediately I began to consider joining Esther and Emma in Budapest, but the thought of leaving my mother alone still made me hesitate. Finally, after I had been without work for a week, spending every day looking for another position without any success, I decided that I had to look for employment in Budapest. As my mother and I sat together one evening after supper, I told her of my decision.

She looked directly into my eyes, covering one of my hands with both of hers. "I've been expecting you to go," she said.

"I'll be with Esther and Emma," I answered quickly, relieved that she was not distressed at my leaving.

"I'd like that. I worry about Esther. Rose talks constantly about Emma. The girls are so young. I'd feel better if you were with them."

"I'll look after them."

"Yes, I know," she said, smiling, stroking my cheek with her finger-tips. "I can always count on you."

A fullness gathered in my eyes and throat. I looked quickly away. The fullness persisted, even as I jumped up to grab a wet cloth from the sink and wipe away a small spot I had found on the table. Finally the feeling was gone, and I sat down.

"As soon as I've saved some money I'll send for you," I said. "We can all live together again like we did here."

"Oh, I don't know if I would want to leave," she said, looking down at the dampness still clinging to the table.

"Why not? It's safer in Budapest, and you would be with us."

"But Rose and Eugene and the children are here. Rose brings the children by several afternoons a week. The baby calls me 'Nana' now . . . Oh, I told you that yesterday, didn't I? And Tamara invites me to their room for tea even though she already has many friends there. It isn't that I don't want to be with you and Esther, you understand. You do know that, don't you?"

"Yes," I answered, looking quickly away.

"We always had such a houseful! Remember all the holidays? There was so much work. All that food to prepare! But I wouldn't change one minute of it . . . " She gazed off into space for a long while.

"I don't think I could live in a big city with all those strangers," she finally continued. "I'm a simple person from a small village. I miss our home . . . the trees, the stream, the flowers in the valleys. The violets! How I loved to see them poke through the snow . . . all the lavender petals springing up in the sunlight. Do you remember?"

"Yes, of course I remember. I miss it all so much I can hardly bear it at times. But we have no money. We can't go back to our home and we can't impose on Herman or Rose and their families. When I find work in Budapest I'll send you part of my wages so you can keep this room. It isn't at all like home, but at least it's yours."

"What would I do without you, Sereń?" she said, taking my hand again. "Will you also visit your father for me? I know you will visit him, but will you tell him that I think of him every day?"

"I'll send you train fare," I answered. "Then you can come and see him, too."

She looked down, her face paling. For a few minutes she sat very quietly. Finally she looked up at me again. "You will think I'm heartless," she said, "but I couldn't. I just couldn't bear to see him." Again she looked down and was silent. "Do you remember the neighbor we had in Lunca de Mizloc who fainted every time he saw a specialist in Bucharest?" she asked then. "He was so afraid of what the physician would see when he examined him that he lost consciousness as soon as he entered the doctor's office. That's how I would be if I went to see your father--terrified of what I would see."

"I'll visit him, Mama. I'll be near him. It's all right."

"No, it's not all right. I'm humiliated to be so weak."

Her eyes filled with tears. She walked quickly to the bed, pulled down the covers and began to undress. I sat at the table for a while longer, watching my mother as she pulled off her blue-checked dress, one of the two dresses she owned, and stood in her white slip, barefoot, staring out of the broken window at the blackness. For a moment she looked like a young girl, slight, her hair unrolled and falling down her back in dark waves. Then she shuddered, winding her arms tightly around herself, her hands clasping her bare shoulders. Letting her arms fall, she crawled into bed, turned over onto her side, her back towards me, and was still.

Two days later I rode the train to Budapest. Emma had written that the shop where she and Esther worked was located only a short distance from the railroad station on a street named Sziget-uca, Island Street, running from the station to the shores of the Danube. The river separated the twin cities, Buda and Pest, the salon being on the Pest side. I began walking down Sziget-uca past apartment buildings stretching up above me in the early afternoon light

in muted shades of gray and brown, past fountains and statues of tall men on horseback. Rain had fallen earlier in the day and a faint, white mist still hung above the damp sidewalks, reached up and around the five and six story buildings.

After a few blocks I came to 5-7 Sziget-uca and was surprised at how beautiful the building was, standing elegantly amid a row of brick buildings. I could imagine within it fine, polished parquet floors, gleaming stair railings, sparkling, crystal light fixtures similar to those I had seen in the upper-class homes in Bucharest.

On the first floor was the lingerie salon, just as Emma had described it, with a large window facing the street. Looking in, I saw Emma bending over a sewing machine and Esther carrying a pile of fabric to the back of the room. I rapped on the window. Emma jumped up, startled, and ran to the door. "Sereń!" she cried. "Oh, Sereń, you've come!"

Esther came running and then fell against me, hugging me to her. Both of them began talking at once, telling me about their new life in Budapest. Everything was more than satisfactory: the wages were sufficient, the work was not difficult and their employer was an agreeable, middle-aged woman who lived on the second floor of the building with her elderly mother.

"She knows very little about sewing so she can't be too fussy with us," said Esther. "But she's a good business woman and sells lingerie to a number of different stores. There's always work. It will be just like it was in Reghinal-Sasesc when the three of us work together again."

"Who's the girl beside you?" I asked then. A small, child-like girl with short, black hair and dark eyes was looking at me with a faint smile on her lips. Down her top lip ran a red mark in a line slightly to one side of

her mouth so that her lips came together in a slightly irregular way when she smiled.

"Oh, this is Ellen!" Emma answered. "She's from the border near Czechoslovakia. She was sent here by the Jewish Congress to be an apprentice."

"I'm pleased to meet you," I said, taking her hand in mine.

"Thank you," she answered in Hungarian, her voice low and soft.

"You look so young to be far from home," I said. "How old are you?"

"Fourteen. There were rumors . . . We were afraid . . . Someone said we would be taken to a ghetto far away," she answered, stopping often as if she could not find the right words. "Mama wanted me to leave while I still could. She hopes that . . . someday I will go to Palestine and I will send for her . . . I had to leave her." Her voice broke and she looked down at her hands twisted tightly together.

"You'll be fine here," I said, patting her on the shoulder. "I left home at thirteen and I'm still around. Esther and Emma can't get rid of me!"

"Don't be silly!" Esther exclaimed. "We can't wait for you to begin working with us again."

"Show me what you do," I answered.

"Look!" Esther said, pulling me to her sewing machine. "First I take a long strip of cloth, make two straps and sew them onto the back panel of the brassiere. Emma adds the front section and Ellen finishes the garment with hooks and eyes."

"You do the same thing over and over all day long?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You never complete a whole garment?"

"No."

"I want no part of it! I would not be able to stand it. I'm a dressmaker, not a machine!"

"You get used to it," Esther said.

"No, never! I have to have variety. I'll stay with the two of you, but I'll find my own work."

At that moment another girl came into the room carrying a large stack of boxes extending from her arms to the top of her head. "Rozi!" Esther said. "My sister's here! Put down your boxes so you can meet her."

The girl struggled with the boxes, trying to shift them all to one arm and hip. A small, oval face, a thick pair of glasses almost covering it completely, bobbed in and out from behind the boxes, smiled quickly at me, dissolved into surprised dismay when the boxes fell to the floor and scattered about her feet. "Oh . . . Oh . . . " she moaned. "It will take me forever to pick these up again."

"We'll help you in a minute," Esther said impatiently. "Now meet my sister, Sereń."

The girl, Rozi, was Gentile, slight, barely five feet tall and pleasant looking, a cap of dark blonde curls framing her face and the enormous glasses. "I'm so glad you've come, too," she said, smiling at me. "Mother will want you to stay with us--with Esther and Emma and me."

"Her mother has been so kind to us," Esther said. "Her name is Mrs. Balogh, but we call her Aunt Terry."

"The three of us are together all the time," Emma broke in, her face flushed and excited. "Won't you please consider working here, too, Sereń? At least try it."

"We'll see more than enough of each other," I said, laughing.

In the early evening we set out for the small apartment, two bedrooms and a kitchen, that was to be home for six of us: Mr. and Mrs. Balogh, Rozi, Emma, Esther and me. The apartment was located in an old, square brick building with a steepled roof in the rolling hills of Buda. As it was on the other side of the Danube we crossed the river on a bridge towering above us in massive arches and guarded on each side of the entrance by great stone lions with mouths open in a roar. Bucharest had been a fair city before the war started, the Paris of Romania, but Budapest was still untouched and even more fair.

When we reached the apartment, Rozi's mother came to the door to greet us. She was a sparse-looking woman, her face long and thin, black hair pulled into a bun at the nape of her neck, her cotton dress faded and frayed. She dusted her hands on the high apron covering most of her dress. "I was just making biscuits," she said. "Please excuse the flour all over the kitchen."

I glanced quickly around. A red oilcloth, the threads showing all around the edges, covered a wooden table. Four white chairs with mended backs were neatly tucked beneath the table. There was no other furniture except the built-in sink and a small gas stove.

Mrs. Balogh held out her hand. "You're Seren, aren't you?" she asked. "Esther said you were coming. But I wouldn't have known you were sisters. You don't look anything alike." She blushed quickly. "Oh, I shouldn't have said that. I just met you."

"It's all right," I answered. "Esther takes after my mother's brothers--tall and dark. I'm short like my mother but fair like our father."

"Well, that explains it," she laughed. "Have the girls told you about the room? It's pretty small, I'm afraid. The four of you will just fit in the

two double beds I have in there. But you can use the kitchen for cooking when you get back from work at night. I'll be through by then. You might have to put up with Rozi's fiance though. He's here almost every night. For hours they sit in the kitchen and talk!" She paused, smoothing back her hair with one, rough hand. "Andrei's a nice, young man, though," she continued. Even Papa can find no fault with him, can he Rozi?"

"No, even Papa likes Laslo ," Rozi answered, smiling.

"Now," Mrs. Balogh continued. "The sink is here by the stove. If you want to do your laundry here, that's fine. Up there we have racks. See them?"

I looked up. High above us metal racks clustered like bare branches against the white ceiling.

"When you want to dry your clothes you pull on this rope by the sink and the racks come down. After you fill them you pull the racks to the ceiling again where the warm air drys them. Now," she continued, "I'll just finish my biscuits and in a half hour or so the kitchen is all yours. And by the way--I'm Aunt Terry."

Within an hour I had put my clothes in a drawer Rozi agreed to share with me, helped Esther and Emma cook supper and tested my half of the bed. I almost felt at home.

The next morning I went to the offices of the Jewish Federation to inquire about a seamstress position. Although no salons were still open, a Jewish matron, Mrs. Kolman, had asked for someone to do sewing in her home.

"I feel I must warn you, however," the clerk at the Federation said, "We've already sent four or five other seamstresses to Mrs. Kolman's home. Each has come back at the end of one day and absolutely refused to return.

"Why is that?" I asked. "Does this Mrs. Kolman bite?"

The clerk laughed. "I guess in a way she does. She is so particular that no one can sew well enough for her. She is a very demanding woman!"

"I have sewn for the royal family in Bucharest!" I answered. "If I can sew for them I can sew for Mrs. Kolman."

The clerk smiled, drawing his lips down on one side of his mouth in a sardonic way.

In a few minutes I was on my way to Mrs. Kolman's house, riding the streetcar to the edge of the city. The house was large and surrounded by pink and red roses hanging lavishly over low, rock walls. A lush, freshly-cut lawn rolled away below the house in waves. "The Jewish people here still live as if there were no war," I thought as I rang the bell, "nor even a rumor of war. . . . "

A tall, middle-aged woman wearing a long dressing gown of blue silk opened the door. "Yes?" she asked in a brusque tone.

"I'm from the Jewish Federation," I answered. "My name is Sereń Tuvel. I'm a seamstress."

"Are you?" she answered, emphasizing the first syllable. "Come along then." She turned away from me and began walking down a long hallway.

I followed her to the back of the house past a large dining room, an enormous sitting room and several other, small rooms all having gleaming parquet floors. When we reached the sewing room I saw a young girl on her hands and knees, polishing the floor with a thick cloth.

"Kathryn!" Mrs. Kolman exclaimed as soon as we entered the room. "Do you call this floor clean? It's disgraceful! The entire room will have to be washed again and then repolished. I'm terribly disappointed in you. Leave the room and attend to the silverware!"

I looked quickly at the floor again; it shone just as brightly as the other floors. For a minute I considered turning around and walking quickly back past all the other floors and out the door. Then, before I could leave, Mrs. Kolman turned to me and said, "You don't know how desperate I've been. I need so many new things and no one the Federation has sent to me seems able to sew a simple seam without making a mistake. I do hope you will not disappoint me, too. You can sew, can't you?"

"Yes, of course," I answered. "I worked in one of the finest salons in Bucharest."

"I see," she answered in an unbelieving tone. "Let me show you what I want." She held up a length of soft, light wool, draping it across her chest.

"It's lovely," I said, genuinely pleased to see such fine material again. "That shade of beige suits you well."

"Doesn't it?" she answered. "I thought so, too. I'm extremely anxious for a dress out of this cloth. It took my husband months to secure it on the Black Market. The dress must be perfect! This is the style I want," she continued, handing me a magazine photograph of a woman wearing a long dress with a high neckline and a peplum around the hips. "My daughter and her husband live here with us. Both of them have very prominent positions in a bread factory on the edge of Budapest. They like to entertain important clients here in our house. So you see how important it is for me to have clothes suitable for these occasions. You must also understand that I can't have someone cutting this cloth who doesn't know what she's doing. Since you tell me you can sew, I assume you will be able to measure me and complete the dress to my satisfaction. Am I correct?"

Briefly I glanced at the door. "Yes," I said then. "I'm quite sure that I can please you."

"Fine. Let's get to work. If you do good work I'll pay you well."

After I measured Mrs. Kolman, I cut out the gown and began to sew it together, enjoying the delicate texture of the cloth after all the coarse army shirts. When I had worked for two hours someone knocked on the door. "Yes?" I answered, wondering why I was being disturbed already.

Mrs. Kolman came in. "I've come to see if you would like some lunch," she said, glancing quickly at the pieces of cloth beside me and then back at me.

"That would be very nice," I said.

She left the room and returned in a few minutes carrying a covered tray. "I couldn't find much in the kitchen. The cook is doing the marketing and I barely know where anything is." She pulled the cloth off the tray. Two pieces of fried chicken, a bowl of soup and several fresh plums gleaming like burgundy wine were placed on the silver tray. The single, cold potato Emma, Esther and I had often shared for lunch appeared in my mind.

"I didn't expect such a fine meal," I said. "You're very kind."

"I feed my help well--if they do the kind of work I expect."

"Would you like to see what I have completed?" I asked, holding up the bodice of the dress.

"Oh . . . if you like," she answered, quickly slipping it on over her blouse. She walked to the mirror on the other side of the room. "It fits perfectly!" she exclaimed. "It's exactly right! You work quickly, don't you?"

"I like to get things done," I answered. "I have no patience for stretching them out forever."

"Well! I'll leave you to your work," Mrs. Kolman said, taking off the section of dress and handing it to me. "At five o'clock the cook will bring in your dinner. At six-thirty you may leave." With a quick, tight smile, she was gone.

I worked through the afternoon and when the cook brought in my dinner I decided to wrap it in a cloth and take it home to share with Emma and Esther. Riding the streetcar back to our apartment building, I held the still-warm dinner against my chest.

When I arrived at the apartment Emma was setting the table and Esther was removing our dinner from the stove: three boiled eggs. The end piece of a loaf of bread was placed on a dish in the center of the table.

"Guess what I have here," I said, walking to the table and setting my bundle down.

"Oh, it smells good, whatever it is!" Emma answered.

I unfolded the linen. There before us was a large chunk of roast beef, a dish of dark brown gravy, a substantial serving of tender, green beans and a mound of rice intermingled with herbs and spices. Esther and Emma looked at the food, glanced back at me as if I were someone they had never seen before, looked at the food again. "Can we eat it?" Esther asked in a hushed tone.

"It's not to look at!" I answered, laughing.

We ate it all, dividing it equally among the three of us, and then we ate the eggs and bread as well. It was the first time I felt satisfied at the end of a meal since my father and I were forced from our home.

I continued to travel back and forth to Mrs. Kolman's home. When I had sewn all the dresses and gowns she needed, she recommended me to the owner of the factory where her daughter and son-in-law worked. "The owner isn't Jewish," she told me as I left her house for the factory owner's home. "Just his wife is. Why tell them that you are a Jew? They don't need to know. Your features are more like those of a Gentile. Let them think you are one."

I took her advice and went to work for the factory owner's wife without mentioning my Jewishness. She, in turn, recommended me to another client. I never went without work, money was sent home regularly to our mother by both Esther and me, and we ate well. Living in Budapest came to seem in some ways as if I had never left Reghinal-Sasesc.

One day I came home to find Samuel sitting on a chair in Aunt Terry's kitchen. "Oh, Sereń!" he exclaimed as soon as I came in the door. He grabbed the covered plate from me, set it down quickly on the table and took me in his arms. "I had to come to Budapest," he said, "I had to see you again!"

My mind went blank. I thought Samuel was safely back in Reghinal-Sasesc where he could not ask me over and over when I would marry him--I had almost forgotten about him, in fact--and here he was, a bear enveloping me with his warm, soft paws.

"Well, that's nice," I finally said, wiggling out of his embrace. "Are you hungry? Sit down! I've brought some food from my employer. It's very good!"

"Now we can get married!" he answered.

"What?"

"We can get married! I'm here. You're here. I'll find a room. We'll get married!"

"Oh, no, not now," I answered quickly. "How can we? I have a good job. I can't take time off to get married. Come on. Do me a favor. Sit down and let me give you a nice, hot dinner."

The evening was passed quickly as I asked questions about each member of the family. By the time I knew what Herman, Tamara, Joseph, Miksa, Ernie, Rose, Eugene, their children, my mother and anyone else I could think of had

done in minute detail since I left Reghinal-Sasesc, it was time for bed. Samuel left to spend the night with a family next door and all discussion of marriage was postponed indefinitely.

The following day Samuel inquired about lodging in the same apartment building as ours and was directed to a Jewish family with a son, Aaron, of the same age as Samuel. Samuel moved in with the family, found employment in the same firm with Aaron and would have been content except for two things: the increasing threats of conscription into the labor force and the lack of time the two of us had to spend together. As we both worked long hours we saw each other seldom, even though we lived in the same building. If the weather was warm and we were not totally exhausted by nightfall, we sometimes sat together on the front steps of the building, talking quietly. Often, however, I yawned so long and frequently that Samuel would finally say, "Go to bed, Sereń! I would love to see you, but how can I talk to someone who's so bored with my jokes she does nothing but yawn in my face!"

"But I get up at five o'clock!" I would protest. "My client wants her dresses completed by the end of the week. And I can use the money. We didn't even pay our rent this month because Mama's rent was due and Esther and I sent almost all of our money to her. If Aunt Terry wasn't so patient, letting us pay her later, I don't know how we would manage."

"Especially since you won't let me lend you any money! Like I said, go to bed. Good night, my sometime-to-be bride."

Wearily climbing the stairs, we went to our separate apartments. Samuel very likely stayed up talking to Aaron long into the night. As for me, sometimes in the morning I could not remember climbing into bed the night before.

Early one Sunday morning a knock on the kitchen door woke me. When I stumbled to it, Samuel was there with a basket in his arms.

"Good morning, my lovely!" he said. "We're going on a picnic."

"But it's six o'clock! I'm not even dressed! And where in the world can we go on a picnic in the middle of a city?"

"My friends have been up in the mountains above Buda," he answered. "There are lakes at the top with beaches. We can lie on the sand all day and eat and swim. Will you come? Esther and Emma can come, too. Two of my friends are waiting for us outside. Say you'll come."

"I'll come! I'll come! Could you at least let me get dressed?"

"Wonderful! I'll wait outside."

We rode the streetcar up into the hills, passing old, beautiful houses built into the side of the mountain, ivy falling about the stones in long, green trailings. We climbed higher, the city below us becoming smaller and smaller, climbed up into the forests. It seemed almost as if I were back at the mill and Esther, Emma and I had invited some friends on an outing in the trees beside the stream flowing down to Valea Uzului.

"There's the lake!" Samuel shouted when we reached the top of a hill. Below us lay a sparkling, turquoise oval in a green clearing.

"Let's race to it!" one of the men shouted.

We all began to run, the men almost flying down the slope, the baskets banging against their legs in bumps all the way down. Esther, Emma and I were overcome with laughter. At last we could not even walk, falling against a log and holding our sides, the tears streaming down our faces.

"We better see if there's any food still worth eating," Emma finally said. "It's probably one, crumbled mess."

We broke into laughter all over again, but at last could laugh no more and ran down the path to the lake. When we reached the shore the men were standing together, their faces red, veins swelling out from their necks.

"I can't believe it. I simply can't believe it!" Samuel was saying.

"What is it?" I asked. "What's wrong?"

"Look!" He pointed to a sign posted in the middle of the beach. It read: No Dogs or Jews Allowed.

"Now we're considered the same as dogs!" he said. "What next? What will they decide we are next?"

"Let's go back," I said, frightened. "There are probably gendarmes patrolling the area. They'll arrest us if they find us here."

"I wanted this picnic so much,"he said, taking my hand. "I've hardly seen you since I came to Budapest."

"We'll have the picnic," I answered. "We'll eat in our apartment, all of us."

"All right. But it won't be the same."

"No, but nothing is the same. . . . "

One night during the following week when I came in from working I found Zipporah sitting at the table with the girls. "Zipporah!" I said. "When did you come?"

"This morning," she answered, not looking at me. She was holding a red rose in one hand, twirling it around and around, idly watching the red blurring.

"Why have you come?" I asked.

She continued to twirl the rose, ignoring my question. I glanced at

Esther and Emma who sat looking down at the floor, Emma tapping her foot up and down on the faded linoleum, Esther holding herself quite still.

"Zipporah," I said, "I asked you a question. Why have you come here?"

"Reghinal-Sasesc became so boring that I thought I would die!" she answered. "All that's left there are old, dead men!"

"The men are all dead?" I asked. "What happened? Was there a purge? A fire-bombing? What?"

"Oh, the men are not really dead, but they might as well be. They're so old and frail that they fall into their beds by nine o'clock at night. All the young men left. I had no one left to entertain me. I had to get out of there! So I came here. And I'm glad I did. Rozi says there are lots of eligible, young men here."

"So you intend to stay here with us and just have a good time, is that it?" I asked.

"What's wrong with that? Rozi's mother is very nice. She said I could stay here if I didn't mind sharing the room with all of you. She's finding a cot for me right now. And I don't eat very much."

"Zipporah," I interrupted, "we all work here. The girls work at a lingerie salon and I sew at the homes of clients. We work very hard! Esther, Emma and I share the rent and also the cost of our groceries. Besides that, Esther and I send money home to Mama to pay for her rent and food. Emma does the same to help Rose and Eugene. We simply have no money to spend on you."

"I knew that you wouldn't want me!" she shouted. "Mama encouraged me to leave Reghinal-Sasesc and come here where it's better. She said that you would help me. Was she ever wrong!"

"What did you think?" I demanded. "That we would support you just as

Father and Herman always have? I'm afraid not. I'll help you, like Mama said. I'll find a job for you."

"A job? I've never had a job."

"I'm very aware of that." Suddenly I was very tired. It was late and I wanted nothing more than to eat our supper and sink into bed. I leaned against the wall, looking at Zipporah, wondering why she had to come and disrupt our lives. She sat quiet, tense, her back turned to me, tall and straight in the chair.

"What do you think you could do?" Rozi asked then in a bright voice. She had been standing in the doorway to our room, quietly watching us. "I mean . . . have you ever thought about what you might like to do if you did work, Zipporah?"

"Oh, well . . . " Zipporah answered. "I could do almost anything if I really wanted to." She tossed her head, flinging the rose into the center of the table.

"The times are very hard," Rozi continued. "Below us lives a surgeon who's working as a janitor. It's the only work he could find. His wife cleans houses. She used to teach in a university."

"A friend told me that there's an apprentice position open at the hairdressing salon on the next block," Emma said. "It's a nice salon."

"A hairdressing salon!" Zipporah answered. "I'd love to work in a salon! At home I used to comb and arrange my girlfriend's hair for hours. I like to create new styles. Everyone is always quite pleased when I'm through."

"Will you see about the position, Zipporah?" I asked.

"Yes! I just got here this morning. Give me a chance!"

Zipporah moved in, placing the toilet articles she had managed to salvage from our home in Valea Uzului in a line stretching across the length of our dresser. For several days she lay about the apartment, sleeping late, bothering Aunt Terry as she tried to go about her housework, claiming that the trip had exhausted her and she needed to rest. In the evenings, however, she became quite animated, staying up to talk with Rozi and Laslo until everyone but she was almost asleep in their chairs.

Finally I presented her with an ultimatum: find a job or return to Reghinal-Sasesc. She obtained the apprentice position in the hairdressing salon where she worked all day standing up. The other girls and I were relieved, thinking that at last we would be able to retire early without having to listen to her loud laughter coming from the kitchen until midnight. Zipporah, however, stayed up as late as before, relating to Rozi and Laslo every, single incident of her work day. Sleeping was something she did only if there was absolutely nothing else to occupy her.

One night as Esther, Emma and I were lying in our beds, Zipporah's loud laughter rolling over us like ocean waves, pulling us from sleep, Emma whispered, "I've never known anyone who laughed as much as her." Zipporah was laughing especially long and hard, stopping only to catch her breath.

"Oh, Laslo," Zipporah finally gasped. "You're so funny! You're wonderful!"

"Do you really think so, Zipporah?" he asked in his low, quiet voice, just loud enough for us to overhear.

"Do I think so? Yes! You're a jewel, Laslo. An absolute gem! Anytime Rozi tires of you please let me know. I mean it!"

"I think you do," he answered softly. "Oh, of course!" he said

louder, jovially, "We're teasing. Only teasing! Rozi and I are engaged! Aren't we teasing, Zipporah?"

Again she laughed, high and trilling this time. "We surely are!"

"I wish Zipporah wouldn't go on like that," Esther said. "I don't think Rozi likes her spending so much time with the two of them. She told me at work today that she wishes Zipporah hadn't come."

"Zipporah is a little bossy, isn't she?" Emma said from her bed. "She told me this morning that she doesn't have enough room in the dresser and I must give her half of my drawer because she has more things than I do."

"Smell this rose . . . " entreated Zipporah's voice from the kitchen. "Roses are so lovely. Don't you think so, Laslo?"

A long pause followed. I pictured Laslo looking at the floor, at Zipporah, at the floor again, finally letting his eyes rest on her face, on the smile always radiating from her wide mouth.

"Yes, they are," he said finally.

Then we heard a door open and Aunt Terry's footsteps coming into the kitchen. "I must ask you to leave now, Laslo," she said. "It's very late. The girls should be in bed. They have to get up quite early. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, of course," he answered. The sound of his chair scraping against the floor as he rose followed immediately.

"I don't think Aunt Terry likes all these late-night conversations," Esther whispered to me.

"I'm sure she doesn't," I answered. "I've told her to leave Rozi and Laslo alone but she won't listen to me."

"Zipporah's just being friendly, isn't she?" Esther asked.

"Good night, Laslo . . . " Zipporah cooed from the other room. "I'll see you tomorrow. . . . "

"Who knows what Zipporah is being?" I answered. "Only Zipporah. She does whatever she likes."

Two weeks later Aunt Terry came to our room after supper as Esther, Emma and I were sitting together darning our stockings. Zipporah was out for the evening with a friend from the salon. Aunt Terry entered hesitantly, a thin smile on her lips, her eyes shadowed in wrinkles. "I don't quite know how to say this," she began.

"Do you want us to leave?" I asked. "Has it become too crowded?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "It's crowded but I don't mind. And I do need the rent money. I don't know how we would get by without it." She stopped talking, tracing a design in the patterned bedspread on our bed with one finger. "It's Zipporah," she said finally, looking up at me.

"What about Zipporah?" I asked.

"Rozi is very upset. Last night Laslo told her that he's no longer sure they should be engaged. Rozi is convinced that it's because Zipporah flirts with him every chance she gets. I've thought about it all day and I've decided that Zipporah must move out of this apartment. If she doesn't then I shall have to ask you all to leave."

"But I love it here!" Emma said. "You're very kind to us. Where would we go if we had to leave?"

"I don't want you to go," Aunt Terry continued. "I like you all very much, including Zipporah. But I can't let her continue to live here if she's going to come between Rozi and Laslo. Rozi is very dear to me. She and Laslo

were very happy before Zipporah came. I can't stand to see her so miserable now. She cries and cries. All night I can hear her sobbing."

"I'll tell Zipporah that she has to leave," I said.

Later that night Zipporah came bursting into the room, the door banging behind her, and threw herself face downward on her cot. "Rozi acts like a spoiled little girl sometimes!" she said. "I can barely stand it! Tonight Laslo and I were outside practicing a new dance step--I had asked him if he knew it and he said he'd be happy to teach it to me--and Rozi suddenly burst into tears and ran down the street. It was such a childish thing to do! Laslo and I . . . "

"Zipporah," I interrupted. "I have something to tell you."

"What?" she asked, looking first at me and then at Esther and Emma.

"Aunt Terry has decided that you can no longer stay with us," I continued.

"What! Why not?" she asked, sitting up. "I thought she liked me."

"You spend too much time with Rozi and Laslo, just as I've been telling you. Rozi is afraid that Laslo will fall in love with you."

"That's ridiculous! He likes me--that's all." She stood up, placing her hands on her hips, feet far apart, "I won't go," she declared. "Aunt Terry can't force me to go."

"If you don't go we will all have to leave," I answered. "I want you to go."

"You can't tell me what to do! Just because you're older than I am you think you're better than me. You've thought that ever since we were children. Well, you're not! I'm not leaving!"

"Zipporah, none of us wants to leave here," I said. "It isn't fair

to make us go because of you. We all want you to go so we won't have to."

She looked first at Esther and then at Emma who were sitting in bed pretending to read. "Is that true?" she demanded, glancing from one to the other and back again.

Neither said anything at first. Finally Emma put down her book, climbed out of bed and went to Zipporah, touching her on the shoulder. "Yes," she said, "but only because I so enjoy living here. I feel at home."

"And what about you, Esther?" Zipporah asked, whirling away from Emma.

"I . . . " Esther began. Suddenly she lay down, pulled the covers over her head and began to cry, her loud sobs the only sounds in the room.

"All right!" Zipporah shouted. "If that's how you all feel, if no one wants me, I'll go!" She jumped onto her bed, jumped back onto the floor, ran to the light switch, snapped it off and ran back to her bed, leaving us all in darkness.

In the morning Zipporah arose very early and left before any of us were awake. When we came back in the evening all of her toiletries and clothes were gone; nothing was left of her.

The next day I went to the hairdressing salon to see Zipporah, but she would not speak to me. Another girl told me that Zipporah had moved in with her. Several weeks later when I stopped at the salon again Zipporah came to me, a radiant smile spreading across her face, and held up her right hand. "Look!" she said. "Aaron and I are engaged!"

"Zipporah!" I answered, "you hardly know him! Samuel lives with him and he has never even mentioned that you and Aaron were friends."

"We've been seeing each other for some time. We just never told anyone. He loves me! He tells me that I am as beautiful as a deep, red rose

sparkling with dew. Isn't that the loveliest thing you've ever heard . . . " She held up the hand with the engagement ring and twirled, head tilted back, hair swirling around her like a fan.

"How can you do this? Aaron is a very serious young man. Samuel has told me how he and Aaron sit up late into the night talking, how Aaron often astonishes him with his intelligence. You are just playing with him! Two weeks ago you were flirting with Rozi's fiance. Now all of a sudden you're engaged to a total stranger. What would Father think if he knew about this? He's in an insane asylum, growing weaker by the day, and you do this!"

She stopped turning abruptly and looked at me, her eyes growing dark, saying nothing for a long moment. "But Seren," she said then, "you're engaged. Why can't I have a fiance if you do?"

"I became engaged to Samuel so Tamara would stop pestering me--that's the only reason. I would just as soon not be engaged now."

"And is that fair to Samuel?" she asked.

I looked away, so angry that I could not speak.

"You've never liked me," she continued. "We're too different. You want to do nothing but work and work and work some more. I would die if I could never enjoy myself."

"Is becoming engaged for the fun of it your idea of enjoyment?"

"It's not just that! We're in love. We love each other very, very much!"

Tears suddenly clouded her eyes. Turning with a jerk, she ran to the back room in the salon. I walked slowly to the front door and stood there for a minute, a great heaviness settling all around my neck and shoulders. At last I went out into the street, willing my feet towards the nearest streetcar stop.

That night I came back to our room and got into bed before the girls had returned from work, my back aching, arms and shoulders throbbing. I wanted nothing more than to slip into a deep sleep. Sleep would not come, however; no position in the bed was comfortable. My mind repeated again and again the conversation between Zipporah and myself in the salon. "She has no right to compare my engagement to Samuel, an engagement I resisted as long as I could, with her romantic infatuation with Aaron," I thought. "Of course it isn't fair to let Samuel love me when I don't love him in return, but how little she understands my feelings. How can I love anyone when our father is slowly deteriorating, when all of us might be arrested and imprisoned at any moment?"

Suddenly I remembered a particular evening when Samuel and I had strolled along the river in Reghinal-Sasesc. "I admire you so very much, Seren," he had whispered. "You're always in control of yourself. "I'm not like that." My chest heaved as I lay in the bed, deep sobs beginning to well up. I could not stop them. Burrowing down under the covers so no one would hear me, I finally gave into them and cried until I could cry no more, at last falling into an exhausted sleep.

Later when Esther came into the room and turned on the light to undress, she saw my swollen, red eyes. "Aren't you feeling well?" she asked, placing her hand on my forehead. "Are you ill?"

I shook my head, unable to answer her.

"You work too hard!" she said. "You're probably exhausted." For almost an hour she sat beside me, stroking the side of my face, my hair, until at last I sank into sleep again, not waking until morning.

When I returned to the salon several weeks later, Zipporah would not

speak to me. Then she changed jobs, moved to another apartment and broke away from us completely. Once in a while as I was travelling on a streetcar to a client's house, I caught a glimpse of her walking along a street in the city, moving quickly, her long hair flying out behind her in a dark wave. She would not come near our apartment, however. Sometimes months went by, and I did not see her once.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

That same summer Emma's thirteen-year old brother, Alfred, my nephew, came to Budapest. He slept on a cot in Aunt Terry's kitchen and worked as an apprentice in the lingerie salon with the girls. As, one by one, members of my family came to live and work in Budapest and I continued to enjoy sewing in my clients' homes, my life flowed from week to week without great difficulty. Samuel and I spent every Sunday together, he always bringing along an ample supper that we ate along the Danube's banks. Friends often joined us. Rumors of the deportation of all the Jews still in Hungary frightened us. However, as we were in the safest possible location available to us we felt reasonably secure; we still assumed in our naivity that we would live out the duration of the war in Budapest. Once the war was over we could return to our homes and resume our normal lives once more.

It was when I visited my father that the insidiousness of the war became most clear. While Esther worked long, regular hours and could visit our father only on the weekend, I created my own hours and could see him more often. If I was sewing in the home of a client living in the same direction as the mental institution, I would leave work early, stopping to visit my father before I went back to our apartment. Sometimes I would be on my way to work in the morning and would feel a sudden pressure in my chest, a crushing. "My father is alone!" I would think. "I must see him!" I would immediately change streetcars and board one going to the institution.

Almost as soon as I arrived at the dreary, stone building, gray and

black moss growing thick on the damp, low walls, I wanted to leave again. To reach the Jewish section of the asylum where my father was, I had to walk down a long corridor having cells on both sides. In these cells were violently insane men, men who peered at me out of the grates in the doors, rattling the locked doors long and hard as I passed. Often a man would yell in deep moans that filled the empty hallway, bounced off the dark walls, swelled around me as I continued to walk quickly to the other end of the corridor, trembling. A single guard always sat on a chair at the far end, fingering a large ring of keys and watching me as intently as the men in the cells. If I glanced at him when I entered the hall to assure myself that he was on duty, he stared back at me with cold, hooded eyes, his mouth a tight line.

When I reached my father's section of the asylum an abrupt change in the nature of the patients became evident. There in one cell a man sat bent over, still, head in his hands, hair falling about his face in matted strands. In another cell a man lay rolled up into a ball on his cot, his clothes rags, feet bare and pitiful in their pure whiteness. Like my father, these men could not accept the loss of their homes, of their wives and children, of their integrity and honor simply because they had been born to Jewish parents who had probably loved them, instilled in them all the dignity and grace of their fathers' customs and beliefs. So they slipped into insanity, into memories of the gentle past, into silence.

As I neared my father's cell each time, I slowed my steps, hesitant to reach him, to see if he had grown even thinner than he was the day before. He who had towered over me when I was a child like a fair-haired god was now shrinking before my eyes.

One day as my father stood up to see me go, having said not more than

three words during my entire visit, a movement of his head, a sudden turning to look back over his right shoulder at something I could not see, made me remember the summer vacations when I walked with him along the mountain trails. During these hikes he occasionally wandered off alone to gaze out over the valley falling away below him, glancing back up at the trees spiraling to the sky. I would look at him, seeing his form silhouetted against the bright sunlight, tall, his feet braced firmly against an outcropping of rock, the wind ruffling his hair. "How fortunate I am!" I would think then. "My father is a good, handsome man." Finally his eyes would meet mine again, blue, vibrant with life, and we would go on with our walk.

I looked at him now, his head down again, shoulders slumped. Shuffling to the door of his cell in worn slippers, he was pulling a dirty gray blanket tighter around his shoulders.

"Father," I said, wanting to say goodbye. When he did not seem to hear me, I called again, louder, "Father!"

He looked up, his eyes completely empty. He did not know who I was. Touching him briefly on the arm, I turned, walked quickly down the corridor and out of the asylum.

Throughout the summer I continued to visit my father, riding the streetcar through the hot, humid late afternoons to the end of the line. As I walked the rest of the way to the asylum, a deep sullenness slowly settled over the entire landscape: grasses withered; low sweeps of field and pasture stretching to the hills on the horizon shrank beneath the still air; ravens clung listlessly to the black branches of the dead locust trees.

By the beginning of August my father seldom recognized me. Sometimes in the space of a whole evening he would struggle up once through the heaviness

like a man almost drowned but still able to gasp for air. His eyes would come to life for a few seconds. "Father, I'm here with you!" I would quickly say, rubbing his withered hand.

"Yes . . . " he would whisper and look at me for a second or two. Then, as suddenly as they had come alive, his eyes would drop down again into emptiness.

One late afternoon as I walked through the asylum gate, wondering how much longer I could endure seeing my father deteriorate little by little, day after day, I decided to be especially cheerful. I would remind him of the time I fell asleep in the wagon at Louise's wedding and everyone thought I was stolen and killed by the Gypsies, while all the time I was feasting on apple-pie.

As I walked quickly down the long corridor between the cells of the violent men, I planned how I would begin the story, how I would save his spanking me until last. Maybe he would even laugh as I reminded him how his goatee had never stopped trembling.

Suddenly my senses jerked to attention. Someone was creeping along behind me! I felt it as strongly as I felt my heart pounding against my ribs. Whoever it was was moving very softly, quietly, as if he wore no shoes. I glanced at the end of the hall to see if the guard was there; I had been so lost in thoughts of my father that I had forgotten to check. No, he was not there. I was completely alone with whomever was following me. Instantly I was sure that one of the insane men from this ward was behind me, that the guard had eliberately left a cell unlocked so that a man might go free as I walked past.

A voice within me ordered: "Run! Run for your life!" Another voice

cautioned: "Be calm. Be calm. Whatever you do, be calm." I listened to the quieter voice, the voice of control, and continued to walk towards the Jewish section at the same pace. A hand fastened itself to my left upper arm just below the sleeve of my summer blouse, held with a terrible grip. I continued walking, walking, my entire body held rigid, contained, my legs moving like a machine carrying me closer and closer to the end of the hall. Very slowly the hand began to relax, the fingers to uncurl from around my taut muscles. I walked on. In another minute the hand was completely withdrawn. As I reached the end of the corridor the sounds of a door clanging shut, of a key turning in a lock rang through the emptiness. With hands trembling so violently that I could barely control them, I opened the door to the Jewish section, not looking back once, and ran to my father's cell.

On a warm Saturday morning in the middle of August I related this story to a Gentile friend of mine, Zora, whom I had met at our apartment; she was a friend of Rozi's. "Do you really think that the guard intentionally left the cell door open?" she asked. "Why would he do that?"

"Because he knows that I'm a Jew. Only Jews are imprisoned in the far section. He saw me walking there every day. One day he decided to leave a cell door open. He probably thought I would be attacked . . . killed."

She shook her head in disbelief. "My cousin goes to the same asylum every Sunday to see her brother. She never sees any loose inmates. She's never been attacked."

"Is she Jewish?" I asked.

"No," she answered, looking quickly away. "I'm sorry, Sereń," she continued, still looking into the distance. "I really am." Then she turned back to me. "I have an idea!" she said. "Come with me to the island this afternoon.

The Red Cross has requested that the people of Budapest visit the wounded soldiers there in the army hospital."

She was referring to a once-fragrant, flowering area, an island in the middle of the Danube, overflowing with fountains and gardens. Musicians sat beneath white picket gazebos, their music drifting towards the island's shores. Jews and Gentiles alike went there every weekend and relaxed among the idle winds playing among the trees. When the war started, however, the island, the one for whom Sighet-uca (Island Street) was named, was turned into a convalescent center for wounded soldiers and closed to all Jewish people.

"How can I go with you?" I asked Zora. "Jews aren't allowed on the island."

"Oh!" she answered. "I keep forgetting that you're Jewish. . . . You look just like me," she laughed nervously. "Oh, come anyway!" she continued. "Who will know the difference? It will do you good to be out in the fresh air. All you ever do is work and visit your father. The island is still beautiful, even if it's been taken over by the army."

The fresh air sounded too good to resist. Even though I had no real desire to see soldiers, I agreed to go with Zora. The night before I had finished the last of five dresses for a client and did not have to begin work at a new home until Monday.

When we arrived at the island and I saw the army flags unfurling in the warm winds blowing in from the river, I remembered how often I had watched the men in Reghinal-Sasesc go singing off to war. Every day huge gray-brown trucks piled high with young men, some of them only sixteen or seventeen years old, rolled out of the city. Many of these men boasted, "I'll get into the SS! Just wait and see!" None of them had been drafted; they had enlisted by

the hundreds and thousands, anxious to help win the war for Germany and for Hungary. In their minds the two countries were one; in their hearts they knew the war was going to be won by them and no one else. When they returned in what could be no more than a few months, a year at the most, they would again be singing, "Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles," and this time it would be true.

When we reached the lawn of the hospital we could see in the distance metal wheelchairs glinting in the light. "I think I'll go see those men in the wheelchairs," Zora said. "Are you coming, too?"

A row of large wicker baskets sitting under some weeping willow trees had attracted my attention. "In a minute . . . " I answered. "I'm curious about those baskets." As she began walking away I continued to look at the baskets. "Can there be babies here, too?" I wondered. "Where would they have come from?" Cautiously I approached the baskets. Maybe babies were in them; the white of clean sheets sparkled in the sun, low cries coming from somewhere near the end of the row. Abruptly, a few feet away from a basket, I stopped. A man was looking up at me, his face a thin oval surrounded by yards of white cloth wound around his skull and under his chin. It was a young, boyish face, the skin smooth and unlined. His eyes were dark, eyebrows black and thick and extending across his forehead, balancing the slender nose, the small, pale mouth.

For a few seconds I could not comprehend what I was seeing, how a man could fit into a basket. I looked quickly down at the man's body. Where his arms should have been, rough stumps brushed against the wicker strands. Where his legs should have been, the basket ended. He was wearing nothing, his poor stub naked. On the grass beside him lay a thin blanket blown off by the wind.

When I looked back at him he was still watching me, his eyes liquid, eyebrows lowered and drawn together. Quickly I picked up the blanket and lay it across him, tucking the edges into the basket. For an instant I glanced at the other baskets, at the rows stretching away across the lawn, carefully avoiding any other faces. In another instant I was half-running across the grass.

Without waiting for Zora I left the island. All the way back to our apartment I held my hand across my stomach, soothing the sick sensation that was threatening to spread throughout my body. I did not get over the sight of those men for a week, lying sleepless long into every night, seeing again and again that soldier's sorrowful face.

Rustling winds cleared the air; it was fall. I had not seen my mother since early spring, and I missed her greatly. As the High Holidays approached I decided to spend some of the savings I had accumulated on a train ticket and go back to Reghinal-Sasesc to spend them with her. Esther chose to remain in Budapest with Emma.

The evening before I was to leave I went to see my father at the asylum, hoping he would be lucid enough to realize that I would be gone for only a few days. Although I would not have thought it possible, he was even more withdrawn. He sat completely bent over, elbows on his knees, head buried in his long, thin hands, the blood vessels standing up like branches on a gnarled tree. His hair fell across them in white, snarled wisps.

"Father," I said. "It's me, Sereń."

He did not look up.

"Father!" I repeated, taking him by the shoulders and shaking him. He raised his head slightly, grunting like an animal. I began talking as fast as

possible, thinking that the sound of my voice could bring back the man I knew was still somewhere inside the body before me.

"I'm going to see Mama for the holidays," I began. "I'll give her your love. By the next holiday you may be out of here or at least by the one after that, and we can all celebrate together. There's still talk of sending all the Jews to Madagascar. It wouldn't be the same as our home at the mill but we would all be together again, and that's the most important thing, isn't it?

"Remember how we loved to play cards at Hanukkah, Father? It was the only time of year that you played cards with us, and you always let us win. Of course, you didn't think we knew that you were letting us win, but we did! Every time each of us won a hand we got a walnut that you had picked up in the woods and dried behind the stove. All evening long there would be the sounds of our hammers tapping the nuts against a brick by the fireplace. And then Tamara would begin to sing a Hanukkah song and you would join in with your deep voice. . . . "

The tears began to roll down my cheeks. I stopped talking, wiping them away with the palm of one hand. Finally I asked, "Do you hear me, Father? Are you there?"

He raised his head, his eyes open, and stared at me out of a well of emptiness having no bottom. "Father! Father!" I cried, running to him, kissing his forehead. "Goodbye!"

Two days later I was with my mother again in the room Esther and I had shared with her. It was the day before Rosh Hashanah and we sat, the two of us, at the kitchen table. I had not talked about my father; she had not asked. Finally, she said, "How is he?"

"Not well," I answered.

"Is he ill?"

"He has suffered. He's grown . . . confused."

"How does he look?" she asked hesitantly, as if she did not want to know.

"Mama, he's changed . . . he's grown old before my eyes."

She looked at me steadily, her eyes filling, overflowing, the tears running down her cheeks in little streams that she did not check.

She began speaking in a voice seeming to come from a distant place. "The first time I saw your father--Oh, I was such a young girl and I had dreams of a tall stranger coming to my door one day. I had no dowry and I knew that I would probably have to take whatever husband the matchmaker could find for me, even if the poor man was ugly. And then came the news that the matchmaker had found a distinguished man who wanted me for his bride and who was said to be quite good-looking. I thought, 'Well, we'll see. Maybe he is and maybe he isn't.' I would become his bride and the mother of seven children--all at once! It was a lot to ask of me, but I was young and healthy and I had always dreamed of a houseful of children. And then the wedding day came and I saw him for the first time. My heart almost stopped beating, he was so handsome and tall. How his hair sparkled in the sun!"

She paused, finally wiping her cheeks with the hem of her apron. Looking at the gold band on her right hand, she continued, "Your father was not an easy man to live with. What he said was the law. I had to obey it . . . but it was his way. He was the head of the family. He always meant well."

That evening after we had washed the dishes and were sitting quietly there was a loud knock on the door. We both jumped, and I ran to open it. A

young boy was standing there holding an envelope. "I have a telegram for Sereń Tuvel," he said.

Taking it quickly I closed the door and sat down again by my mother. "Who's it from?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know! I hope it isn't from Ellen saying that Esther or Zipporah has been arrested. I should never have left them!"

I tore it open. It read:

Sereń,

Father shot by police. Went berserk in air raid. Jewish Federation burial. Come back soon.

Esther

I handed it to my mother, watching as the color drained from her face. Then she began to shriek and we fell into each other's arms.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Far into the night, far past the dying of the lights on our street, the fading of the last footsteps, past the deepest darkness before the stars begin to fade, I sat up with my mother. "When did you last see him?" she would ask. "What did he say?" An hour later the same questions were asked again as if she were afraid that she had already begun to forget him and wanted to fix him in her mind forever. One of us would begin to cry and then the other. Suddenly she would laugh at a memory that had come into her mind and then, with a sharp gasp of breath, realize anew that oh, he was dead, and she would never see him again.

When it was almost morning we collapsed into bed, but I could not sleep. Every small rustling startled me. I kept seeing in my mind the faces of Herman and Rose when I told them of our father's death. Rose burst into tears, drawing her youngest child close, hiding her face in the baby's dress. Herman stood quite still, looking out past the walls of the room to a vision only he saw, the tears running soundlessly down his face and into his beard. A look passed over his face, a resignation. His shoulders slumped; he let his head drop. He and Tamara and their sons and Rose and Eugene and their children returned to our room with us. We sat together through the evening--long moments of silence interrupted only by deep sighs easing down around us. When Rose's baby began to cry they went back to their rooms. My mother and I were left alone.

Now that it was morning again, the sorrow having lodged in a corner of our hearts that would never again be entirely free of pain, we talked quietly. My mother had before her on the table the jewelry, given to her by my father, that we had not sold. Seven or eight long, delicate gold chains trailed across the table and beside them three silver chains spiraled around a small collection of brooches and rings set with rubies and tiny dots of diamonds.

"I did not realize that you had all of these chains," I said.

"Your father's first wife must have loved them," she answered. "She had so many of them. After she died and he married me, he placed all of them in my jewelry case. I protested but he said, 'Why shouldn't you have them?' I accepted them then, thinking that one day I would pass them on to Berta and Rose and Louise so they would have something of their mother's. Now I don't even know whether Berta and Louise are still . . . " She stopped, took a deep breath and went on. "Rose has Eugene. He is a very good husband to her. But you, Esther and Zipporah are alone in Budapest. I worry about you all the time."

"We are fine! We have enough to eat and good jobs."

"Nevertheless, I worry. I want you to take these for the three of you. Maybe sometime you will not have a job and then you can sell a chain or a ring."

"No, no, they are yours," I said. "They are all you have left of Father."

"I want you to take them," she reiterated. "They are not your father. They will not bring him back. Take them."

I could see that she had decided and would not change her mind. I gathered the chains, rings and brooches together and put them into a cloth case in my handbag.

When the holidays were over I decided to return to Budapest; my sisters were still there, as well as my clients, and I could do nothing more for my mother. It was early evening when my train left and everyone accompanied me to the station: Rose carrying the baby Estelle in one arm, Eugene holding Elena's plump hand, Magda standing to one side, Tamara and Herman, their sons behind them, and my mother, holding onto Herman's arm so tightly that I wondered if she would fall if she let go.

"Come back soon!" Tamara commanded as she came up to me. "I want you to take this hat," she said, handing me a black turban with cascades of red, yellow and deep blue ribbons that she had bought long ago in Targul-Mures. "It would look wonderful on you in Budapest." She hugged me, enfolding me completely in her arms. Finally my mother left Herman's side and sank against me.

"I won't ask you when you'll be back," she said, kissing me on the forehead.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," I said. "I'll miss you, Mama." Then I hugged her one last time, her small body soft and warm in mine, and climbed into the train. I hurried to a window where I could see them below me on the platform. As the train began to pull away, Rose moved Estelle's hand back and forth, back and forth, and my mother smiled and waved. Suddenly I thought, "I may never see them again!" I had lost my father; anything seemed possible now. I wanted to run off the train, but the engine had begun to pick up speed and in another moment my family was gone from sight. Finally I sank back into the seat, riding further and further away from them into the night.

When the train reached Budapest I went to the lingerie salon to see Esther and Emma. They were sitting at their machines, Emma sewing but Esther

simply staring at a length of cloth she had between two fingers of her right hand. When she saw me she looked into my eyes, her eyelids half-lowered, lips trembling, mouth drawn down on either side. Tears began to run down into the creases beside her nose, falling onto the cloth in her hand. I went to her and began to smooth her hair.

"I'm so sorry I wasn't here," I said.

She said nothing for a long while, continuing to cry quietly. Then she began to tear at the piece of cloth in her hand, pulling off threads at first and then entire strips. "A man from the Jewish Federation was here . . . this morning," she said haltingly. "He helped prepare Father for burial. When he undressed Father he saw black and blue bruises covering his back and chest, his neck, his arms and legs . . . "

She broke into sobs, shaking beneath my hand. I remembered seeing our father from the cell window while we were in prison together. His whole body had been one massive wound. That was almost a year ago; he must have been beaten continuously since then. I sank down into a chair beside Esther, sobbing as wave after wave of fresh grief passed over me and I thought I would never finish crying. Finally I remembered the telegram.

"They told you Father was shot because he went berserk in an air raid. Did the man who was here tell you about a bullet hole? Did they find one?" I asked.

"I didn't ask," she answered. "I don't know if there was one or not."

"Did you attend the funeral?"

"Yes, Emma and I went together. Then Father was taken to the Jewish cemetery, but I don't know in what section he was buried . . . I didn't want to see him lowered into the ground. I couldn't see that, too."

"You did well, Esther," I said, drawing her to me. "You took care of it all. Everything is over. . . . "

The fall and winter of 1942 passed in a sullen, gray haze that hung over the city, stretching to the very edge of the horizon. I worked, saw Samuel now and then, put food into my mouth, washed my body, slept in the bed next to Esther and Emma--all as if I were asleep and dreaming. I could not forget the slow destruction that had crept upon my father almost imperceptibly, like a choking growth on a tall, green tree until his vitality was sapped and he crumbled.

Sometimes in the middle of the night when the sirens began to sound and the explosions seemed suddenly so close that my heart contracted into a hard ball inside my chest and I had to bite my lip to keep from screaming, the image of my father suddenly came into my mind. He was running around in circles, banging on the door of his cell, emitting a long, low cry like that of a wounded animal. A shot would sound, stop him dead. "No, no, it couldn't be!" I would think to myself as I bolted up from under the covers. "They only said he went berserk during an air raid so they could kill him. It was not like him to lose control." Then the bombing would begin again somewhere in the city and I would think, "No one could stand this for long. Perhaps he went berserk. Perhaps he did after all."

The winter passed. The haze remained. One day in late March Esther came home from work and announced, "Our employer wants Emma, Alfred and me to move in with her. You may come, too."

"Why?" I asked.

"She's heard that all Jewish people will soon be forced to leave many areas of the city and made to move in with other Jews--two or three families

to one apartment. We'll all have to live in one area of the city. She wants us to move in before she's forced to take in strangers."

"Do you want to move?" I asked.

"It would be very convenient. We could live above the salon. And I like Miss Seidman. She would give us our own room."

"All right. We'll move. I would rather live with her than with just anybody. Who knows where they would put us?"

We left beautiful Buda and moved into a room in Pest above the salon. Esther and Emma thought the convenience well worth the disruption of our lives again and the tearful farewell to Aunt Terry. I continued to travel back and forth to my clients' homes outside the twin cities. Even Alfred was happy for he could now work longer hours and soon came to enjoy sweeping the floors and doing errands early in the mornings before he began his sewing. He, Ellen, Esther and Emma worked well together and enjoyed each other's company.

While I no longer lived next door to Samuel, I saw him every Sunday as before. He had begun to worry more and more about the increasing threat of drafting all Jewish men into the labor force. "It will be any day now," he said one Sunday afternoon as we sat on the grass by the Danube. I'm sure of it. While the thought of being taken away from you, Sereń, is terrifying, what is even more frightening is the way some of my friends are acting."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "They must be so afraid . . . "

"No! That's just it!" he shouted. "If they had any sense at all they would be scared to death! Who knows where they will take us? No, they're not afraid. They're proud! Can you believe it? They think it's patriotic to become part of a labor force. They're going to serve their country! My friend, Josiah, said to me last night, 'I'm a Hungarian first, a Jew, second.'"

"What did you tell him?" I asked.

"What do you think? I told him he was crazy, of course! He just laughed in my face. So I asked him, 'Did you ever stop to think that we Jews will be put in a separate group, that the army will be able to do anything to us that they like?' Do you know what he answered? 'We will be serving our country. There is no higher honor.' At that point I walked away. There was nothing more I could say to him."

Two weeks later the order was posted: all Jewish men between the ages of fifteen and fifty were to report in three days to certain locations to be inducted into the labor force. On the night before he was to leave Samuel came to our room again, as he had for the previous two nights, bringing me the clothes he could not take along and requesting that I keep them for him until he returned.

As he turned to leave that night, Esther, Emma, Ellen and I all gazing out at him from the doorway to the apartment building, he asked, "Could you come with me to the corner, Sereń?"

I took his outstretched hand and we began to walk slowly along Sighet-uca Street, the stars above us burning through the blackness in sharp glimmerings as if there were no ban on lights, no bombings.

"Will you come tomorrow morning?" he asked. "Then I could see you one more time . . . "

"Yes," I answered. "I'll come. I was planning to come."

"Oh, Sereń," he said then, stopping and turning to me. "What if I never see you again?" He squeezed my hand so tightly that I wanted to cry out.

"You'll see me!" I said. "I have all your clothes! Do you think I want to carry them around with me forever?"

"But what if . . . " He grabbed me to him and held me as if he would never let go again.

"I have to go back, Samuel," I said finally. "It's very late. I'll see you tomorrow."

He released me very gradually, hesitantly. "Goodbye, Sereń," he said then, his voice breaking. Abruptly he turned and walked quickly down the dark street.

Early the next morning I watched the men lining up in the courtyard of the apartment building where Samuel lived, the same building where we had stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Balough and Rozi. Many of the men were smiling, patting each other on the back as if they had all been invited to participate in an exciting venture and were congratulating each other on having been included. They were wearing uniforms and strutting briskly up and down the flagstones, completely ignorant of how the yellow Star of David on their armbands marked them, set them apart, made them targets for persecution of any and all kinds.

At first I could not find Samuel, but then I spotted him hovering at the edge of the group, glancing anxiously at the crowd of women who had come to kiss the men goodbye. We were all kept at a distance from the men by members of the National Guard. I stood at the back of the crowd, wondering if Samuel could see me amid all the taller women crowding ahead. Most of these women were as excited as the men.

"I'm so proud of my David," one older woman was saying. "He's always loved his country. Now he has the chance to serve it. He couldn't wait to go!"

"Yes, isn't it wonderful?" a younger woman replied. "My fiance is

exactly the same. He's the one standing next to the steps with the dark, curly hair."

"My, he's very handsome!" the first woman replied.

"Isn't he? He looks so good in that uniform!"

Just then Samuel spotted me and began to frantically wave his hand back and forth. I waved back, attempting to smile. He was a good man, a caring man. At any other time I would not have resisted marrying him.

Then the men were ordered to form lines and to begin marching down the street. For a few minutes I lost sight of Samuel as the women began to wave their handkerchiefs back and forth at the passing men, to call out, "Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!" Finally I saw him looking back to see if he could glimpse me one last time amid the sea of handkerchiefs. His face was wet, tears running unabashedly down his cheeks.

"Samuel! Samuel!" I called. He looked again quickly but then a tall woman moved in front of me, completely blocking my view. By the time I could see anything again he was gone. The backs of thousands of anonymous men marched further and further away from me. I walked slowly towards the streetcar stop and went to my client's house.

One morning in May, as I was working at a home on the outskirts of Buda, I heard a loud, hurried knocking and then Esther's voice coming from the living room. Running into the room I found both Esther and Emma standing there.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The police came!" Esther said. "Emma and I were in the back of the shop packing a shipment when we heard them in the front where Alfred was sweeping."

"They asked for Alfred and me," Emma said, beginning to cry. "I

looked at Esther and then we ran out the back door without even thinking . . . We left Alfred." She was by now crying with deep sobs.

"You did what you had to do," I told her. "Now you will have to go away somewhere."

"What do you mean?" Emma asked.

"If you go back they will arrest you."

"What about Alfred? He's my little brother. I've always watched over him."

"You can't help him by going back. I'll try to find out what happened to him. You go with Esther to Samuel's old room. They can hide you temporarily."

When I went back to our room, Alfred and Ellen were gone. The police had taken them both, even though they did not intend to arrest Ellen. I ran to the police station.

"Do you know where I can find Ellen Weise?" I asked the policeman sitting behind the front desk. "She was taken from the lingerie factory on Sighet-uca Street this afternoon along with a boy."

The policeman was old and had a large, red face with jowls that hung down below the mouth. He stared at me for a long moment without saying anything, his small eyes peering out of the folds of fat above his cheekbones.

"What is it to you?" he said finally, saying each word slowly, methodically.

"She's my friend," I answered.

Again he stared at me for a few minutes in silence. Then he came towards me until his face was inches from me and asked, "Why is the whore lying?"

I backed away. "What do you mean?"

"We were sent to arrest a sister and a brother. The sister ran away with another girl, but we got the boy. This Weise whore won't tell us where the girl went. But she knows!"

I backed away further, edging towards the door.

"If you know where she is," he continued, "tell her we're not letting Weise go until she turns herself in."

Controlling my pace to keep from breaking into a run, I left and went to Samuel's old room.

"Did you find Alfred?" Emma asked as soon as I came inside.

"The police have him," I answered.

"Oh! And Ellen, too?"

"Yes. They are keeping her because they couldn't arrest you," I said.

"I can't let her stay in jail because of me. She has done nothing. I have to go back."

She went back alone, afraid that we would also be arrested if we accompanied her; while I did not look Jewish, Esther did. Emma found the police waiting for her inside the lingerie shop. They took her to the police station where they were holding Alfred and Ellen. As soon as she was locked inside a cell they released Ellen who came back to us at Samuel's room. She was shaking and her thin arms were covered with deep red marks where a policeman had squeezed her flesh with his hand; I could see the outline of his fingers on each arm.

"They kept saying, 'Tell us! Tell us!' and every time they shouted 'Tell' one of them squeezed my arm. But I couldn't tell them where Emma was. Why did she come back? I would never have told where she was."

The line on her upper lip had turned darker and she, sensing this, kept bringing one hand to her mouth to cover it.

"She knew that the police took you in her place," I said. "It's all right. She chose to come back."

"But what will happen to her and Alfred?" Ellen asked.

"I don't know," I answered. "No one knows."

A week later Esther and I obtained permits to visit Emma in the city jail. When I saw her in the cell with five or six other Jewish girls looking out at us fearfully, I thought back to the time I was in prison with the others from Valea Uzului a year and a half ago. While my father and I and those with us had been accused of spying, I could not understand why Emma and Alfred had been singled out for arrest now. We were in Budapest, a long-standing haven for all Jewish people. If Jews were now being arrested here for no reason, we were all lost.

Esther was carrying a kettle of vegetable soup we had cooked for Emma and handed it to her as soon as we were allowed inside the cell. When Emma put down the kettle Esther hugged her, "Oh, Emma," she said. "How can you stand it?" I had told Esther very little about the time my father and I spent in prison.

"I'm all right," Emma said. "But I'm so glad you brought some soup. They don't give us very much to eat. And they must have a terrible cook. The food has no taste."

"Have they told you why you and Alfred were arrested?" I asked.

"No, they have said nothing. No one even speaks to us. . . . Oh, guess who I saw going into the men's section yesterday? Miksa!"

"Miksa! Herman's son?"

"Yes. They must have arrested him at Reghinal-Sasesc and brought him here," she answered.

"Did you see anyone else--Herman or Eugene?" I asked.

"No, only Miksa. I watched again this morning as the men were taken outside to exercise and I saw Alfred and Miksa walking together, but no one else I knew. Miksa walked funny--like his back hurt. I'm glad he's here for Alfred. I know I shouldn't want him in jail and I don't. But since Alfred is only thirteen I'm glad Miksa can look after him here. Do you understand how I feel?"

"Of course," I answered. "You and Miksa were always friends, weren't you?"

"He's my favorite cousin. When we were little we made a fort beside Grandfather's mill . . . your father's mill . . . with some old boards Grandfather let us have. Miksa allowed me to be a general, even though I was a girl." She laughed for a minute and then grew very quiet, looking down at her hands wound around each other tightly. When she raised her eyes to mine they were calm, the dark brown irises large and clear.

"What do you think will happen to us, Sereń?" she asked.

While she had been talking a realization had jolted me: Miksa had been arrested, brought here, interrogated, beaten and forced to accuse his cousins, Emma and Alfred, of some crime they had never committed. I had been through the same process; I knew how easily one could be humiliated and broken if there was the slightest weakening of the will. I looked at her. "I know you have done nothing, Emma. Believe in your innocence. That's all I can tell you. Be strong, Emma. Be strong!"

A week later when we came back to visit Emma and Alfred they, as well

as Miksa, were gone. No one would tell us where they had been taken. We did not even know if they were still alive.

Now that my father was dead, my niece and nephew taken away, Samuel gone, the sense of security Budapest once offered grew less with each passing day. I came to live in constant fear that Esther, Zipporah and I would also be arrested, that we would never see our mother and the rest of our family again. Remaining in Budapest took on aspects of living out a play which I had read through and knew the outcome while the other characters went along reading only the lines for each day. While I tried to think of what we might do to escape arrest, where we might go, many of the other Jews living in Budapest laughed at my fears, believing that they were safe. If nothing else, marriage to a Gentile and conversion would save them.

Most of the Jews in the city had converted to Roman Catholicism when they married Gentiles. This practice had begun before the war. It was mainly in the small villages that the Jewish people remained true to their traditions. Other Jews sought Catholicism as a guarantee against persecution, the Christian missionaries constantly encouraging their conversion with promises of safety. According to two laws passed in 1938 these attempts were futile. An anti-Jewish law with the title, "A Bill for the More Effective Protection of Social and Economic Life" stated that all Jews who had converted after July 31, 1911, were Jews, no matter what they professed to believe. The bill in 1941 was even more limiting; a half-Jew married to a quarter-Jew was a Jew, even if he or she had converted, and a person with a single Jewish grandparent was a Jew. Many of the people I came to know in Budapest, however, did not believe that these laws would be enforced as long as they converted and were faithful Gentiles.

I was continually reminded of how prevailing this attitude was among the well-established Jews by my clients. One day Mrs. Kolman, who had called me back to her home to sew a summer gown, told me, "You are perfectly safe here. I don't see why you worry so much."

"How can I be perfectly safe here?" I asked. "I can be perfectly safe nowhere as long as Jews continue to be arrested for no reason."

She began to laugh, her silver dessert spoon poised above the plate as we sat over lunch. "No reason! Surely you are joking. No one is arrested without a cause."

My niece and nephew were."

She shrugged her shoulders. "That is an isolated instance. They must have done something. We are safe here. Both my husband and my son-in-law have been taken into the labor force. But am I worried? Certainly not! They're only doing their duty. Besides, many of the Jewish people, like I, have taken Gentile names. You can look through the entire phone directory and not find more than a few Jewish names. There are so many inter-marriages. Premiere Horthy himself has a Jewish daughter-in-law. He would not let anything happen to her, would he?"

"She's still Jewish. Even he may not be able to help her."

"Nonsense! She's converted!" Mrs. Kolman pushed aside her plate and gazed out of the dining room windows at the lawn turning bright green in the spring light. "That's what you should do--convert," she continued. "I am considering it myself."

"No, I couldn't," I answered. "I was born a Jew."

"But the Church has promised to save all those who do convert."

"If I gave up Judaism and converted to Christianity solely to save myself, what kind of Christian would I be?"

"One who is not in prison."

"I don't think that would save me. I would still be a Jew in the eyes of the Hungarian government as well as in the eyes of the Nazis."

"It can't hurt to try," she continued. "I think I'll discuss it with my daughter's employer, the president of the bread factory. He and my daughter are very close friends. His wife was Jewish, but she converted before they were married and has been a faithful Roman Catholic ever since. Their children do not even know that their mother was Jewish."

During the spring I had come to know Mrs. Stolaki, the wife of the president of the factory; she wanted a new wardrobe and I was recommended to her by Mrs. Kolman. Mrs. Stolaki lived in a large, red brick house on the edge of Budapest with her husband and three children, two girls and a boy, who were fifteen, sixteen and seventeen years old and attended the Gymnasium. Every day during most of June I rode the streetcar to her house and sat for long hours in her sewing room. She often curled up in an easy chair on the other side of the room from me, an embroidery frame in her hands, and talked about household trivialities. I sensed at these times that she was upset over something, for hours passed while she did not complete a stitch in her frame. Finally one day she said, "My husband is the president of the bread company, you know--the largest one of its kind in the entire city."

"Yes," I said. "I know."

"He has a very important job with many duties, many responsibilities. He is highly regarded in the business world."

She stopped talking and began to pull a strand of floss tight against her hand, winding the deep, red threads around her small finger.

"He keeps informed about the war," she finally continued. "He has

followed each of the bills concerning the Jews. I am Jewish . . . I mean, I was Jewish. He can't be too careful, you know."

When I came to her house several days later she met me at the door with red eyes, a handkerchief wadded into a ball in one hand. She kept pulling a bit of lace showing between her thumb and the rest of her hand.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Oh, yes . . . but . . . my husband. He has decided . . . " She turned away and walked into the sewing room, closing the door behind us.

"My husband has told the children that I was Jewish before we married. They became very upset. He wants me to leave."

"But where would you go?" I asked.

"That's what I asked him and he couldn't give me an answer. My parents are dead. This is my home! Why should I leave? Where would I go?"

The next day when I came back to her house I rang the bell but no one came to the door. I rang again, waited and was turning to leave when a young girl of sixteen or seventeen opened the door. She was dressed in a brown wool tweed suit and a matching hat with a plumed feather that perched on her blonde curls at a slight angle. "Yes?" she asked impatiently.

"I'm the seamstress," I answered. "Seren."

"Have you been working for someone here?"

"Yes, Mrs. Stolaki."

"Well, she's not here. We won't be needing you anymore."

"Where has she gone?"

"If you must know, my brother and sister and I turned her in last night. The police came and took her away."

"You did such a thing? Why?"

"She's a Jew. Isn't that reason enough? All these years and we didn't know it. It was my father who finally told us."

"But she's your mother!"

"She's not my mother any longer! How could a Jew bitch be my mother?"

I quickly turned away to keep from slapping her face and walked down the sidewalk as fast as I could. Shuddering, I boarded the streetcar again and went to the home of another client. A week later I heard of a similar instance. Thereafter many Jews were turned in by their families.

The bombings, which had rained down upon us sporadically throughout the winter, intensified as the weather became less severe. All through the long summer nights Esther and I, alone in our bed, hovered on the edge of wakefulness, unable to let ourselves drift into deep sleep. An air raid siren might sound at any second and we would have to jump out of bed and run down the stairs in the utter darkness of the blackouts to the basement shelter. Esther tossed about on the bed all night long, lying first one way and then another, jumping up and running to the window at the slightest noise.

"Try to get some rest," I would tell her. "How can you work tomorrow if you get no rest?"

"I can't. Oh, I can't!" she would answer. "I want to sleep so badly but everything frightens me."

Night after night the Russians lit up the sky with firebombs burning like great orange torches in the blackness. By mid-summer we were spending part of nearly every night in the shelter, crouched in a corner with the other people from our building. As we huddled together the ceiling of the shelter swayed down towards us. The men and women around us began crying out, their eyes fastened on the moving timbers above us, the dust falling in steady

streams on our heads. We began rising and falling with the motion of the ceiling up and down, up and down, human waves ebbing and flowing with the roaring dark.

During one of these long nights, as the whole building shook in rumbling convulsions, Esther began to scream—a long, high crying that rose above the thundering bombs.

"Stop, Esther! Stop!" I yelled. "Esther!"

I put my arms around her but she continued to scream. Then I saw the towel that I still had in my hand; we had been washing the dishes when the sirens began.

"Here," I said. "Tear it. Esther, as a favor, tear it."

She looked at me as if I, too, had gone berserk, her eyes dark and wild, but she took the towel from me and began to tear it into strips. The first strip was slow, methodical, running the length of the towel, the second also, but by the third she was tearing frantically. With one quick wrench the strip was ripped off and thrown onto the floor.

"Slowly, slowly, Esther," I said. "Tear it slowly. Concentrate all of your attention on making the towel last until the bombing ends."

She began to tear again, pulling very cautiously, speeding up when a bomb hit nearby and then slowing down again. When the bombing finally stopped a pile of strips lay about her feet, a ragged edge still held within her hands. Every day after that I brought home scraps of material left over at my clients' homes and kept them under my pillow. When the sirens began to scream I grabbed a scrap for Esther and we ran to the shelter.

Each night when the explosions died to an occasional, muted thundering in the distance, we straightened up and waited for the signal to go back to our

rooms. When it came, we opened the door to the shelter cautiously, afraid that nothing but the smoking air would rise above our heads. Finally we crawled back into our beds, restless dreams disturbing our sleep during the remainder of the night. In the mornings we saw the debris blocking the streets. While it took me hours sometimes to reach my clients' homes, most of the destruction was centered around the railroads used to supply Germany's forces in occupied Russia.

As the bombings continued, those whose homes had been destroyed were moved into the remaining apartment buildings. The building we were in was a double building with two numbers, Five and Seven. As it went out to an island in the middle of the Danube, railroad tracks running down its length, it was bombed often. While no one was moved in with Esther and me, as we shared a very small room, we felt the overcrowding when we tried to find a place to sit in the basement shelter; there was not a single place to stand if we were late. Sometimes we ran to the door and then had to crouch outside amid the falling firebombs.

One Sunday the weather was particularly warm, the sun brighter in the sky than it had been for several weeks, and no bombs had fallen on us for three days. I decided that there might be enough peaceful time to cook vegetable soup for our dinner, but as I was slicing a carrot the room grew dark. I ran to the window. The entire sky above me was black with American planes, the drone of them roaring down upon us. There had not been the slightest warning.

"Sereń!" Esther screamed. "The shelter!"

"It's always so crowded in there," I answered. "Let's just stay here. These planes won't bomb us. They're going somewhere else."

"No!" she yelled. "I want to go. Please!"

As we were still standing there the window shattered and fell into a thousand pieces at our feet, the door exploded and flew at us, the walls rumbled, moving up and down in waves. Esther grabbed my hand and we ran into the bathroom and threw ourselves down on the floor beside the tub. Immediately the walls caved down around us. Chunks of plaster began hitting our backs, skidding along our arms and legs, piling up around us until we were completely surrounded by debris. Finally the falling stopped, the roaring, the sifting down of dust subsided, and it was still.

"Esther! Esther!" I called. "Are you all right?"

A moan answered me and then a fit of coughing.

"Try to relax," I said. "We're caught here. But someone will come looking for us as soon as they see that we're missing."

I mentally checked all the parts of my body and, deciding that no bones were broken, tried to wiggle back and forth. I could not move anything, the debris tight against my body. As I was flat against Esther who was pressed into the side of the tub, there was no way we could become free without help. A pocket of air trapped with us above our heads kept us from suffocating. If someone found us before we had used it up, we would be all right.

Esther began to moan again. "Someone will come. Someone will come . . . " I said to her over and over, willing my voice not to betray the terror growing in my own heart. I had been terribly foolish to believe that we would never be hit.

After what seemed like hours I heard voices. Soon the rubble was being lifted from behind me. In another few minutes we were free and a woman was applying bandages to our cuts and bruises. We were both stiff and sore for many days afterwards.

Our building had been completely destroyed. We, like many before us, were moved in with another family in the building on the other side of the courtyard. Ellen and the owner of the lingerie shop were moved in like manner to the floor below us, but the lingerie shop was gone. The family who was forced to take us in consisted of a woman and her two daughters, Lily and Zora; her husband had been arrested and taken away. The woman, Mrs. Cohen, did not look upon Esther and me as two refugees who were forced into her apartment, but rather tried to make us feel at ease, sharing her meals and making a bed for us in the corner of the room.

Lily became good friends with Esther, as they were both seventeen years old. I became fascinated with Lily's near-helplessness. Raised to be a lady, to marry young and hire servants to help her do everything, she had never worked at a job outside her home. She asked endless questions about our work when Esther and I returned at the end of the day.

"Where did you go today?" she would ask me, peering out through the very thick glasses she groped for the first thing in the morning, as a crippled girl reaches for her cane.

"I went to a suburb outside Budapest. I'm making a suit for a businesswoman, Mrs. Schwartz."

"You went all that way? By yourself?"

"Why should anyone go with me? I sew the suit by myself. Should I take someone along just to hold my hand on the way there?"

She blushed and lowered her eyes, her long, brown hair falling about her face. She was as pretty and delicate as Louise had been as a young girl.

"I'm teasing you," I laughed. "What did you do today?"

"Oh . . . " She looked around the room as if the answer to my question

were lying on the table or on a chair or perhaps on the worn, burgundy rug. "I don't know . . . embroidered, I guess. Would you like to see what I'm working on?"

"I would love to see it," I said.

She ran to get the hoops with a piece of linen stretched between them and held up the filled-in picture: a young girl wearing a long, pink dress reclined in the middle of a garden of red roses, white doves flying to her hand and a silver stream trickling at her feet.

"It's lovely," I said.

"I'm glad you like it. I'll give it to you when it's finished," she said.

"No, you save it for your hope chest. Your fiance, David, will want to see it hanging in your house someday."

She blushed again. "Yes, he might." She pulled out her needle and began to fill in a dove.

Esther and I stayed with Mrs. Cohen and her daughters throughout the summer and early fall. Our mother continued to write from Reghinal-Sesesc and the news was always the same: food was growing scarce and they were all learning to get by on less and less. She did not mean by these letters to suggest that I send her more money; she was simply relieved that three of her children were in a place where they could work. I did not tell her of the bombings. Every month I tried to save enough money to visit her again, but the lingerie factory where Esther had worked never reopened and she had no job. My income paid for our rent and our food. The rest of the money I sent to my mother for her necessities. There was nothing to spare.

One evening as I was coming up the stairs to our room, thinking about

the groceries I would buy as soon as I received payment for the dress I was finishing for a client, I saw Zipporah on the landing above me. It was the first time I had seen her in months.

"Sereń!" she called. "Wait there."

She came down the stairs slowly, cautiously, not at all in the manner she usually descended--in little leaps taking in three or four steps at a time.

"I need your help," she said as soon as she was three steps above me. She looked down at me steadily, directly into my eyes. "I know you don't approve of me, but you must help me. You must!"

"What is it?" I asked. "Are the police after you? Do you want me to find a place to hide?"

"No, no, nothing like that."

"It's . . . " She looked down and began to stroke her skirt, her hands curving up around her hips and down across her stomach. Finally she looked at me again. "Can you guess?"

"No! Zipporah, don't go on like this. What is it?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Oh, Zipporah! Oh, my God, Zipporah . . ."

"I didn't mean it. Aaron and I were so in love. We couldn't wait. We just couldn't. Now he's in the labor force. I don't even know when I'll see him again."

Her face slowly became mottled, dark red blotches appearing on both cheeks. A tear slid down one side of her face, fell on the collar of her jacket. She continued to look at me.

"Zipporah," I said, "what do you expect me to do?"

"I've thought about it all day. I want you to help me find one of those doctors."

"Me? You got yourself into this! You wouldn't listen to me when I told you to leave Aaron alone! Now all of a sudden you want me to become involved."

"Please help me, Sereń. You're my sister! I have no one else."

I wanted to run back down the stairs and out into the street. Zipporah had betrayed everything our mother and father had taught us; no respectable Jewish girl even thought of such intimacy with a man until she was his wife. I looked up at her again. She was circling her stomach with her hands as before, tears gathering at the corners of her eyelids.

"How far along are you?" I asked.

"I'm not sure . . . three months I think. When Aaron knew he had to leave we . . . "

"Do you really want to do this?" I asked impatiently.

"I don't know what else to do. Do you?"

I thought for a few, long minutes. No, there was no other solution.

"Will you help me?" she asked again.

"Tomorrow I'll ask one of my clients to suggest a doctor," I answered.

She looked at me again, wiped the tears away with the back of her hand and went past me down the stairs. "I'll be back tomorrow night," she called up.

I turned to look after her.

"Don't tell any of this to Esther," I said in a loud whisper.

"No, I won't," she answered.

She went out the door and was gone.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

On a cold, gray Monday morning one week later, Zipporah and I set out for the address Mrs. Kolman had given me. I knew only the location of the street, the color of the building where we were to go and the fee we could expect to pay. I had left our room early in the day as usual, telling Esther that I was going to sew for a customer living far outside the city and would probably not be home until late in the evening. Zipporah met me at a corner a block away from our apartment building and we boarded the streetcar together.

She sat beside the window looking out at the buildings passing by, the men going to work in black suits and gray, felt hats, the women shopping in housedresses with bright red and yellow scarves tied on the back of their heads, wicker baskets on their arms, small boys trailing after them in jackets, sho rt pants and high, black stockings. She had said nothing all morning, not even greeting me when we met, and still sat silent, her eyes fastened on a spot she had fixed on in the lower part of the window. Only her hands moved, trembling, the left hand lying loosely in her lap, the right holding a cloth bag.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

She did not respond, continuing to gaze out of the window.

"Zipporah," I said.

Her eyes slowly left the window, traveling across the front of the streetcar, came to rest on mine.

"Are you all right?" I asked again.

"I'm scared," she said. "It will hurt, won't it? I know it will hurt." She shifted in the seat, turning her back to me, and fixed her eyes again on the same spot. We rode the rest of the way in silence.

The trip took over an hour as we traveled to the edge of Buda, changing streetcars twice. Finally we arrived at the intersection closest to the address I had been given, got off the streetcar and began walking down the wide street past old mansions set back from the sidewalk and almost hidden by towering trees. Lawns of lush green grass rolled beyond wrought iron gates and beds of yellow chrysanthemums blossomed along the bottom of the high fences.

"Where are we?" Zipporah asked. "I didn't know such places existed in Budapest."

"This is a very wealthy area. Only Gentiles live here."

"How do you know where to go? What if we get lost?"

"Don't worry. I know where we are. A client of mine lives on the next street."

"You have Gentile clients?" she asked.

"I don't tell them that I'm Jewish."

"Oh . . . " She looked at me quickly.

"Are you ever asked for your identification?" she asked.

"Never. No one has ever asked to see it."

"I'm always asked. Why do I have to look Jewish when you don't?"

"But Zipporah! I have admired your dark eyes and hair since we were children."

"You have?" She stopped walking, turning to look at me again.

"Come on," I said. "We better hurry. I don't want anyone to see us here."

Beginning to walk faster, we covered the next few blocks quickly and were within half a block of the address when a car coming up the street from behind us began to slow, following us as we walked.

"Keep walking!" I said. "We're almost there."

"Who is it? What do they want?"

"I don't know. Try to ignore them."

With a sudden slam, a man in the uniform of the Hungarian National Guard bolted from the car and ran up to us, drawing his rifle as he ran.

"Halt!" he shouted.

I grabbed Zipporah who was bracing herself to run, her arms drawn tightly against her side, head lowered. "No!" I whispered.

The soldier ran directly in front of us, blocking our path, while another man came from the back of the car to stand behind us, rifle pointed at our heads.

"Jews are not allowed in this part of the city!" the soldier in front of us shouted. "Get in the car!"

"Oh, please, let us go," Zipporah said. "We'll go back to where we came from. Please . . . "

"Get in the car!" he shouted again, moving a step closer.

The man behind us opened the back door. We climbed in, the door was locked behind us and the two men got into the front, one in the driver's seat and the other turned toward us, his rifle facing Zipporah's chest. She began to sob, "No, no, no, no, . . . " I sat, staring at the streets flying by my window, trying to determine where they were taking us. The thought of being taken to prison again was like a fire burning in my breast. There was a possibility that my earlier arrest and imprisonment had been recorded and that I

would be treated even more harshly because of it. Would I be sent away like Emma?

After a few minutes it became apparent that we were not being taken back into the city; the car was now out of the residential district and speeding past fields of wheat and peasant huts surrounded by two or three out-buildings. Fluttering, brown chickens ran squawking in front of the car, the driver swearing as he weaved in and out to avoid hitting them. A cloud of dust seeped in through the cracks of the window and sifted onto the panels of the door. Finally we turned onto another road, bumping along for half a mile or so, and came to a bridge that had been destroyed. Several women were walking towards it carrying long planks while other women stirred what looked like cement in big tubs, soldiers standing beside them with drawn bayonets. The car came to a stop and the men jumped out quickly and flung open both back doors.

"Out!" they commanded in unison.

We were herded to a tent a few meters from the bridge. There we were each handed a shovel and told to start digging holes for pilings on both banks of the river. We were in a work camp, I realized, and I was somewhat relieved that we were not taken to a prison; we would probably be treated decently as long as we did the assigned work. Then I remembered. Esther! She would become frightened when I didn't come back at night. "She will think that I am dead," I realized.

That night we slept on the bare ground under the trees, huddled beneath a thin, worn blanket thrown to us by a guard. Zipporah had fallen asleep as soon as she stretched out between me and another woman, but I lay there listening to the leaves, to the stream trickling below, for hour after

hour. The wind in the aspen trees rustled with each sweep of the night wind. The sound was familiar; the wind in the trees in Füleháza had made the same sound the night my father was preparing the boiling water to use against the students coming to burn down our house, and the other small children and I had been hidden in the garden. Again I was beside Zipporah, now exhausted with her pregnancy, breathing deep, even breaths in the cool October air. "How can she sleep and I lie awake?" I wondered. "If it weren't for her neither of us would be here." At last I must have drifted into sleep for the high, shrill cry of a young rooster crowing from a distance startled me awake.

The days merged together: we carried boards, poured cement, lifted rocks, dug holes, cleared roads, ate, slept, moved to a new location, began again. Our group consisted of other Jewish women from Hungary who had been seen, like us, in the wrong place at the wrong time. The heavy work kept us from becoming acquainted, the rifles trained at our backs discouraging any conversation. Each of us was alone.

By the end of November snow fell daily from the gray sky that hung above us like a heavy, dark cloak. Every evening we cleared the drifts from a space on the ground and threw a tarpaulin cover over the frozen earth, but we might as well have slept on the snow. The chill penetrated our cover, our clothes, our flesh, until it seemed as if a quilt of ice enveloped us from all sides, from above and below.

One night Zipporah stopped shivering, settled into a spot near my left shoulder, and was almost asleep when she gasped, "Oh!"

"What is it?" I asked. "What's wrong?"

"I felt something. I don't know what it was."

"Where did you feel it?"

"In my stomach, I think . . . There! I feel it again. Yes, it's in my stomach."

"Does it hurt?"

"No, it's a strange feeling--like my stomach is moving."

"Oh, Zipporah, it's the baby."

"What?"

"The baby. It's quickening."

"What are you talking about?"

"Rose told me about it when she was expecting Elena. It means the baby is big enough to move around."

"Oh, Seren, what am I going to do?"

She began to cry, heaving against my shoulder with sobs that grew in intensity until I was afraid that she would grow sick from crying. I thought of reaching over, stroking her hair, telling her that everything would be all right, but I could not promise her that when anything might happen. We were alone, almost frozen, dead to our family. I lay there, silent. Finally she stopped sobbing and fell asleep. I drew the blanket up around her shoulders, turned over and settled for the night.

Two more months passed. Hanukkah came, although I did not know the exact date as we could not distinguish one day from the next. I thought of our mother and hoped she was still safe. Surely Herman or Rose had taken her in when she didn't receive any rent money from me these last three months. Was Esther all right? Lily's mother was probably looking after her. And what would happen to us? How could Zipporah give birth to a baby by the side of the road like a farm animal? She was growing bigger; a small mound rose beneath her coat and she left several of the buttons undone.

One day she and I sat on a rock eating supper in the dim light of late January. I was looking at her, wondering how a healthy baby could grow inside her here in the snowy fields with barely enough for her to eat, no vitamins, no milk. She did not seem to notice my stare and sat kicking some loose stones.

"Do you remember when we used to fight those peasant boys on the way home from school, the ones who called us 'dirty Jews'"?

"Yes," I answered, "I hated them."

"Weren't they terrible? Remember the time two of them had you pinned against the bridge and were threatening to throw you in the river? Then I came up from behind and hit one over the head with a rock and kicked the other in the seat."

"No, I don't remember."

"Well, I do! They ran all the way across the bridge and didn't look back once. One took your hat, though."

"Oh, I do remember now," I said. "I had forgotten. They took the brown hat Mama knitted for me . . . You were a feisty little girl, weren't you?" I asked, laughing.

"So were you! Remember the time you burned my hair? We were playing under the kitchen cot and you lit a candle."

"Yes!" I laughed. "Mama yelled, 'What's scorching?' It was your hair!"

Zipporah smiled. "I wasn't always bad."

"Oh, Zipporah, I know. . . . "

She looked away into the darkening sky and said no more.

The next evening we lined up for supper as usual before walking past the food tent. Snow was falling in hard, tiny bits that stung my face as I

trudged forward slowly, Zipporah in front of me, the wind whipping into the space between us and blowing her long scarf across my face. As I was leaning forward to tell her to wind the scarf around her neck so it would not hit me, a guard shouted, "You! Halt!" He was pointing to Zipporah.

She jerked around to look at me, her eyes asking, "What is it? Why is he singling me out?"

"Step forward ten paces!" the same guard shouted.

Zipporah began to walk away from me. I knew instantly that this was wrong, that I should grab her, stop her, stop her. I could not move.

She took the ten required paces. The guard strutted to a place a few feet from her side, raised his rifle, and in one quick, terrible instant, in one movement that almost stopped my heart, he fired. Zipporah fell to the ground.

"No! No!" I screamed and ran to her, lifting her from the ground. A trickle of blood ran down one side of her face from a deep hole in her temple, ran past the black mass of hair around her neck, dribbled into the snow in a thin, red line. She slumped against my shoulder, dead.

"What is the slut to you?" the guard demanded.

I looked him straight in the eye. "She is my sister."

"She shouldn't have gotten herself pregnant, the whore!" he sneered and walked away.

I cradled Zipporah's head in my arms and rocked slowly back and forth, back and forth. She was so still. She who had whirled about on the dance floor joyously, in complete abandon, now lay quiet, arrested. The pale winter light fell across her high cheekbones in slanting rays, lingering on her slightly open, full lips, rested on the hair falling about her face and over my arm in a rich, black flow.

"How can this have happened?" I asked myself over and over. "How can I have allowed this to happen?" The guard was coming back with a cart. Slowly I lowered her head to the ground and covered her face with the long red scarf. She had loved red. "It is like fire!" she said once. "It suits me."

Finally I backed away and looked at her lying there in the snow, her hands covering the small mound. Shuddering, so cold that I felt naked in the dying light, I walked away behind the other women to the far end of the field.

I could not eat. I could not sleep. All night I cried, going over the shooting again and again, trying to think of how it could have been prevented. If I had been kinder to Zipporah, if I had not forced her to move out of Aunt Terry's house, she might not have become pregnant; I could have looked after her more and none of this would have happened. No, I decided, she would not have listened to me. Then I should have grabbed her today when I knew that something was going to happen, thrown myself in front of her. I had stood there, not moving at all, until she was shot and it was too late. It was all too late. Over and over the same thoughts surged through my mind relentlessly until I must have lapsed into a half-sleep towards morning.

As I lay there a loud voice suddenly called out to me in the darkness: "Sereń!"

"Who is it?" I answered, bolting up from under the blanket.

No one was there.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I was alone. Every day the biting wind swept across the wide fields, drifting the snow over the fences, over the ditches and across my legs covered only by thin stockings. Shoveling into the wind, I cleared the roads, concentrating on the scrape of the shovel, the swish of the snow, the crunch of my feet against the ground. I did not want to think about Zipporah. I could not bear to think about her. The days passed . . . even the nights.

One morning at the end of February we were told that our special detail had completed its work and we were free. Immediately I began walking back into the city, reaching the edge of Buda late one afternoon. At first everything looked the same, but the closer I came to the Danube the more it ceased to be the city I had left last October. Wide expanses of land, empty except for solitary, blackened chimneys, stretched before me where once had stood rows of apartment buildings and businesses. Jumbled piles of broken bricks were scattered amid the pitted dirt. Sometimes a single building was left standing, nothing left of the windows except holes through which pigeons flew in and out, nesting above the bits and shards of broken glass. I felt like I was back in the burned-out Jewish section of Bucharest. "Many people must have been killed by the bombs," I thought as I hurried on. "Esther can't have been killed. I can't have lost her, too."

After crossing the Danube I began to run, stopping to catch my breath every few blocks. I was encouraged by all the buildings still standing and thought, "Esther and the others are safe. I know it! They're safe!" When I

came to Seven Sziget-uca at last, it looked almost the same as when I had left it early that morning to meet Zipporah. Three or four windows were broken and stuffed with cloth and a hole was gouged out in the front, but the building stood.

Ringing for the elevator three times with no response, I realized that it must not be working and began to climb the stairs to Mrs. Cohen's apartment on the fifth floor. I hurried up the first two flights, paused on the landing for a minute and was beginning to ascend the third when I heard someone slowly coming down the stairs above me. The steps became closer and a girl rounded the landing, her head bent downwards, one hand listlessly sliding along the banister. It was Esther. Oh, it was Esther!

"This is a fine welcome," I called out. "You don't even say hello!"

Her head jerked up so quickly that it snapped and her eyes grew wide. She stared at me, standing quite still, one foot poised in mid-air. "Sereń?" she asked quietly.

"Who else?" I answered.

Flying down the remaining steps almost as if she had wings she reached me in an instant and hurtled into my chest. She hugged me again and again, kissing my cheek and hair, finally sinking against me and sobbing.

"Come, Esther," I said, holding her close. "It's all right. I'm back."

She continued to cry for a few minutes, but then her sobs gradually subsided. "You disappeared!" she said in an accusing voice. "No one knew where you were. And when I tried to find Zipporah she was gone, too. Where were you?"

"I was arrested and taken to a work camp. They allowed us to go free only this morning."

"Why? Why did they arrest you?"

"I don't know," I lied. "The National Guard just arrested me. They wouldn't tell me why."

"Do you know where Zipporah is? Was she arrested, too?"

I looked past her at the fading light slanting through a window on the landing above us. Dust motes drifted to the floor, flew up and eased up again. While I did not want to tell Esther about Zipporah's pregnancy, I knew I had to tell Esther of her death.

"Seren," Esther asked then, "is Zipporah all right?"

"No," I said, beginning to stroke her hair.

"She isn't dead! She can't be dead!"

"I'm afraid she is."

She pulled away from me abruptly and looked into my eyes as if they would tell her, perhaps by a light in them, a crinkle around the edges, that I was only teasing her, playing a macabre joke, and that Zipporah would come bouncing up the stairs behind us in another minute, laughing.

"If she's dead then how did she die?" she asked. "Tell me! If you don't know how she was killed then maybe you only think that she's dead."

"We were arrested together. One day a guard just shot her. I saw it."

She drew another step back, looking at me so harshly that I could not endure her gaze and had to look away. "You saw it?" she asked in a hushed tone. "But how could anyone shoot Zipporah? How could anyone kill her?"

"She was singled out one day. I wanted to help her but it happened so fast. She was . . . " I stopped, afraid that I would tell her more than I wanted to. "Could we go to our room, Esther? I can't talk anymore now."

She put her arm behind my back and I leaned against her, suddenly exhausted. Together we climbed the stairs.

For the next few days I enjoyed the luxuries of sleeping between clean sheets and warm comforters, bathing as often as I liked with soapy, steaming water, eating hot meals at a table. Mrs. Cohen greatly enjoyed cooking for me. She was one of those rare people who can prepare a nourishing, appetizing meal out of nothing more than rice, a few vegetables and a sprinkle of seasonings. I ate, rested, scrubbed off months of grime and perspiration and looked forward to acquiring new customers and working again. Within a week I found several women in the outlying reaches of Buda who needed a dressmaker. Once again I was in business.

The first few days of March, 1944, came clear and cold, the sun warm on my face as I walked to the streetcar in the early mornings. There was a tension in the air, however, that I had sensed as soon as I returned to Budapest. Germany was losing the war, her troops retreating from the advancing Russian Army across the snow and ice fields of Russia to the Hungarian border. By the middle of the month swarms of German soldiers were converging on the city. I could not go through the streets without seeing mile-long streams of motorized divisions moving like slow, brown armadillos. Shuddering each time I saw them I thought, "It's too much like Bucharest. We're no longer safe. One morning I'll again see Jews dangling in the still, morning air."

Later I learned that I had good reason to feel so threatened then; Eichmann himself had come to Budapest and taken up residence in the Majestic Hotel. He and his assistants formed the Sondereinsatz Kommando Eichmann, the Eichmann Special Operation Unit. Their "special operations" had been successfully completed everywhere in Europe but Budapest. All of their energies could now be concentrated on us.

All we knew at the time, however, was that Budapest was beginning to

move in on us. Each day we felt less free than the day before. There was no escape: to the east was Romania from which we had been deported; to the west, Austria; to the north, Slovakia and Poland; to the south, Yugoslavia--all controlled by the Third Reich. Even if we could have escaped through these countries and the rest of Nazi-dominated Europe, who would have welcomed us? Where could we have gone? A few Gentiles took in small numbers of Jews and hid them. Sweden produced small miracles in saving us. The Norwegian Resistance fought long and hard. However, for the most part, we felt abandoned.

On the twenty-ninth of March I came home to find Esther, Lily, Zora and Mrs. Cohen all making Stars of David out of yellow cloth. "Has it come to this?" I asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Cohen answered. "A notice was tacked on the door to the building this morning. All Jewish people have to start wearing the Star by tomorrow."

"What if we don't wear it, Mother?" Zora asked. "I don't want to."

"Oh, you must!" Mrs. Cohen answered. "You'll be arrested if you're caught without the Star." She looked at me then. "Sereń, I guess you'll have to give up your clients. That's too bad."

"Why?" I asked. "We need the money."

"Your clients are Gentiles. When they see you coming up the sidewalks of their fine homes with the Star of David pinned to your coat, they'll turn you away."

"I won't wear it then."

"You have to!" Esther exclaimed.

"You don't look a bit Jewish, do you?" Mrs. Cohen said to me then. "You could easily pass for a Gentile, even now."

"I have before. I can again. It's all right, Esther," I said, turning to her. "I'll be very careful."

"You're so brave," said Lily.

"No," I answered. "I'm practical. I don't want to give up my customers!" Laughing, we sat down together to supper.

The next day I left for work without the Star of David and boarded the streetcar. A German SS soldier was standing at the front of the car shouting, "Jews to the back! Jews to the back!" The Gentile passengers sat in the seats stretching to the very end of the car where fifteen or twenty people all wearing the yellow star were crowded together in two rows of seats. A Jewish man and three women were trying to walk to the back while the streetcar turned a corner and several of the Jewish women fell against the sitting passengers.

"Lazy swine!" one of the Gentile passengers yelled. "You should walk."

As the streetcar slowed and came to a stop I jumped off, even though I was still miles from my destination, and began to walk. Every day after that I left our apartment at six o'clock in the morning and walked for two and a half hours to reach my customers' homes rather than suffer the sight of seeing the other Jewish people sitting humiliated in the last rows of seats.

More restrictions were imposed: the few, remaining Jewish stores were painted with large signs says, "Shopping forbidden here"; Jews could walk only on the curbs of the streets; all butter, eggs and rice were forbidden; sugar, fat, milk and meat were rationed; telephones, cars, radios, and books were taken away.

We tried to live as normally as possible. During the days I continued to work while Mrs. Cohen maintained a home for Lily, Zora and Esther amid the almost daily bombings by the Americans. At night we lay in our beds, completely

dressed except for our shoes, a packed suitcase sitting by the door, and hoped the air raid sirens would not howl. If they did begin to scream we jumped up, slipped into our shoes, grabbed the suitcase and ran down the five flights of stairs. By the time we reached the shelter, blazing "Stalin candles" were falling in the yard all around us.

One night in early April Esther and I came up from the shelter after a particularly heavy bombing and crawled back into bed just as thunder began to roll across the sky. A few minutes later lightning sizzled and then drops of rain began to drum, sounding as if they were hitting the ceiling rather than the roof directly above. A drop of water hit my cheek with a plop, another splashing on my nose.

"Esther," I said. "It's raining in here."

"What?" she answered from under the covers.

"It's raining in here! The roof must be gone!"

She peered out, lifting a corner of the quilt. A drop hit her in the eye. "Oh!" she yelled. "I'm getting wet!"

Heavy pellets of water were now splashing against the headboard, against the floor, sinking into the blankets.

"How can we sleep in the rain?" Esther whined. "We'll drown."

"I'll be right back," I said and jumped out of bed. Lighting a candle we kept on the night table, I carried it to the kitchen in the rain now pouring down like mountain streams, covering the candle with one hand. With the other hand I removed the top from the table and brought it back to our bed. I crawled back in, placing the table top over us. It was almost perfect, not heavy enough to crush us but large enough to cover most of the bed; only our heads protruded into the rain.

"The umbrellas!" I said. "Where are the umbrellas?"

"Under the bed," Esther answered.

Reaching with one hand I found them--one a peacock blue with white butterflies woven into the silk and the other a bright yellow.

"There," I said, placing the blue one over Esther's head and the yellow one over mine. "How's that?"

"I feel like I'm lying out in the grass under the sky," she giggled.

"Ah, but I have the sun above me," I said, blowing out the light. We slept under the umbrellas throughout the remainder of the night almost peacefully, the raindrops gently lulling.

The next day a Jewish mother and her four, young daughters were moved in with Esther and me while another family joined Lily, her mother and Zora. Ellen and her former employer were forced to take in two families. Our building had become a ghetto filled almost entirely with women whose fathers, husbands and brothers had been arrested and taken from them. All over Budapest that day and the next thousands of Jewish women and children were evacuated from their apartments and forced to leave behind all of their furniture and most of their clothing. As I walked through the city I saw them herded through the streets by the Hungarian National Guard, mothers holding the hands of children, babies wrapped in blankets and nestled against their breasts. One or two children sometimes trailed behind, stumbling sleepily in the cold morning air and crying, rubbing their faces with both fists. When one lagged too far behind, a soldier prodded the child with the butt of his rifle, causing the small boy or girl to run blindly, screaming. The mother would look around in terror, hearing her child's cry, and then grab the child to her desperately.

Several days later all the windows facing the street in our building

and all the other buildings in the section of Pest that had become the ghetto were boarded shut. A large, yellow Star of David was nailed to each of the front doors. The ghetto was carefully chosen, centered as it was around the main railroad station and the tracks running out from it where the bombings were most intense. For a few more weeks we were free to come and go as long as we were back in the ghetto by evening. I continued to work, to shop for groceries.

One late morning towards the end of April I was shopping for some vegetables in the small grocery store near our building when I overheard two Jewish women talking.

"A ghetto has been made for all the Jews in my village," one was saying. "The SS roped off an area on the outskirts of the town and forced the Jews into it. Then they put guards all around it. No one can come in or go out. My mother still lives there. I am so worried about her!"

The other woman looked out from under a white, wool scarf tied under her chin and pulled out over her forehead. "What's the name of your village?" she asked.

"Reghinal-Sasesc," the first woman answered. "I left it many years ago. If only I had taken my mother with me!"

I ran up to the first woman and touched her on the arm. "Are you sure that this has happened in Reghinal-Sasesc? Maybe you have the villages confused. My mother lives there and my brother and sister. They haven't written anything about a ghetto."

"Yes, I'm sure," she answered. "My nephew escaped from there only last week. He stopped to visit me on his way to Sweden."

I hurried back to our room, completely forgetting to buy the vegetables.

When I arrived I went to Esther who was talking to several of the other girls in our room.

"Esther," I said as soon as she and I had withdrawn to one side. "The SS has made a ghetto in Reghinal-Sasesc. We must try to get Mama out and bring her here! Do you have any money hidden away?"

"No," she answered. "I had a little but I was forced to spend it when you were gone."

"It's all right. We'll have to think of something."

By the end of the week I finished a dress I was making for a client and received payment. On Sunday I wrote a letter to Mama enclosing the money for the train ticket, but on Monday another notice was posted on our door stating that travel was forbidden to all Jews in Hungary. "Oh, Mama," I thought. "When will I ever see you again?"

From then on we lived in an environment closing in on us daily. No letters from Mama or Rose came. I continued to walk back and forth to the homes of my customers, but I felt increasingly set apart from the rest of the world, in contact only through the rumors that multiplied constantly, feeding upon themselves. One day I heard that all of the Jewish people were being taken out of the ghettos throughout Hungary and moved to another country. When I told this to Mrs. Cohen she said, "No, the Jews are being taken to an island in the Mediterranean. I have it on good authority!" The following day it was another place; a new state was being created where all Jewish people would be allowed to govern themselves. I kept asking myself over and over, "But where are they taking Mama? How will I ever be able to find her again? Where are they taking her!"

One evening Esther ran up to me as I was coming in the door to our room. "Do you know what?" she asked. "A soldier from the National Guard was here today and said that our mail is being held at the Jewish Federation. Every day they receive cards from the villages. Before the people are moved they let them write to their relatives. Maybe Mama has written or Rose. Can we go tomorrow and see?"

"Of course, we'll go," I answered. "If this is true, Mama will have written. Maybe a postcard is waiting for us!"

Early the next morning Esther and I went to the office of the Jewish Federation and found many other people on the sidewalk in front of the building, all waiting for the office to open. As we sat together on the curb an hour passed, two. Finally an older man in a black flannel suit, a large Star of David pinned to the upper right pocket, limped to the door with the help of a wooden cane and unlocked it. Slowly, in a dignified manner, he removed his gray homberg and motioned for us to come in. As many people as possible crowded inside the office, the rest pressing against the door frame. Esther and I found an opening beside his small desk.

"Have you all come seeking mail?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"Yes," a young woman near him answered. "That's why I'm here."

"Yes! Yes!" others around her answered, bobbing their heads up and down, their eyes serious, wide.

"I'm sorry to say that I have only a few postcards," he said. He picked up a small pile of mail. "Is Anne Tenenbaum here?" he asked. "Anne Tenenbaum?" Our eyes darted to each others' faces. No she was not among us. "Hurry!" I thought. "Go on to the next one!"

He picked up another card. "Herman Kuhn?" he asked. "Is Herman Kuhn

here?" An old man with a short, white beard shuffled forward and grasped the postcard in his hands. "My daughter . . . " he said, the card trembling in his frail hands.

Another name was called out. "Miriam Zhitamir . . . Miriam Zhitamir . . . "

A dark woman whom I had noticed because of the red, plaid shawl she had lavishly draped around her shoulders, shouted, "That's me! I'm Miriam Zhitamir!" She made her way to where Esther and I were standing, grabbed the card and pressed it to her chest with both hands, rocking back and forth for a few, long moments. "It's from my mother," she finally said. "Do you want to see? Oh, I'm so happy!"

I took the card from her. "Dear Miriam, my love," it read. "I am still well. Mama." I wondered where her mother had been when she had written the card, where she was being taken, why she had not written more. The handwriting was hurried, uneven, as if she had written it while riding on a train.

No more names were called out. We were told that perhaps a few more postcards would be dropped off in the afternoon. For the remainder of that day, for many days afterward, Esther and I stood in front of the office and waited. Each day a few people were handed postcards; each day two or three could go back to their rooms in the ghetto, tears of relief streaming down their cheeks. Their mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife, sweetheart had spoken to them from hundreds of miles away.

On the fourth day of waiting Esther asked, "Why doesn't Mama write? I'm so worried!"

"Maybe she did," I answered. "Maybe her card was lost."

"Do you think she's all right?"

"We have to believe that she is. She won't like having to live on an island or in another country. But she'll be fine. She has to be."

No postcard ever came.

Then one morning I came down the stairs ready to begin walking to a customer's house and found a chain and padlock on the gate going across the building's courtyard. Two guards were posted on the other side, guns raised. We had become prisoners for twenty-three out of twenty-four hours of every day. For one hour, between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning, the gate was unlocked and we were able to go out of the courtyard to the markets. Fortunately our building had by now become a smoothly-running entity in itself. When the ghetto was made, each apartment building had selected a committee to oversee daily operations. In our building the committee was composed of a few, elderly Jewish men who had not been taken into the labor force because of their age. They were intelligent, reasonable men, former doctors, professors and heads of businesses, who tried to make life as pleasant as possible for us. Several men kept the shelters cleared of debris and ready for us. Other men constantly repaired the pipes so that we were never without running water. If a problem arose, such as whose responsibility it was to keep the hallways clean, a meeting was held in the courtyard and any conflicts were resolved.

Our life was bearable. No one contracted a disease because of unsanitary conditions; the building was always kept clean and orderly. No one went hungry; if one roomful of people did not have enough to eat, we shared. No one defied the decisions of the committee and caused an uproar; we were all Jewish women who had been taught from childhood to respect the judgment of men without stopping to either analyze or criticize their pronouncements.

Yet a dreariness, a stifling, permeated our days. Again I had been robbed of my work. What did we do to remain sane? By the time we arose from our crowded beds, for most of the women nothing more than a quilt spread on the floor, folded the bedding, put on our shoes, drank a cup of tea, it was ten o'clock and the gate was unlocked. This was the procedure only if we had not been surprised by an early morning bombing or been up late because of a midnight raid. Then we went through the open gate and ran to one of the few, remaining grocery stores in our area, hoping to arrive before the store was full and the lines stretching out into the street. We were issued coupons once a week allowing each of us to buy a limited amount of food: one-half pound of meat per week, one-fourth cup of sugar, one cup of milk. Fortunately Mrs. Cohen had saved a small amount of money and we used this when mine ran out. Sometimes Esther and I actually reached the front of the line during the hour and were able to buy food; sometimes we were still standing in line outside the store when the hour was nearly up, and we had to hurry back to the building before we were locked out. Any Jews outside on the streets when the hour was over were arrested and taken away. On many days, days stretching into a week or more at a time, the bombing was so intense during the hour from ten to eleven that we did not leave the shelters.

In the afternoons the priests came. First we would hear the ringing of a bell, jingling in the warm air of late May. Then snatches of sermons would come drifting up to us from the courtyard where many of the women had gathered to hear these missionaries. The Catholic Church had not believed any of the decrees defining a Jew as one who had Jewish ancestors. It still regarded "the Jewish question" as a religious one while the Nazis saw it as one of contaminated blood. Not realizing the real significance of this view

of us as "spoilers of the race," as none of us did, the Catholic Church continued to try and convert as many of the Jews as possible.

Several of the young girls who lived with us went to a meeting in the courtyard one afternoon and came back to our room with flushed cheeks, gold crosses dangling from their necks on metal chains. I could not help smiling at seeing the cross hanging inches away from the yellow Star of David pinned to their chests.

"I see that you've converted," Mrs. Cohen said to them.

"Yes!" answered Mira, a young girl of sixteen. "The priest promised that we won't be deported to another country now that we're Christians. We can stay here in Budapest. The Church will save us!"

"Do you really think so?" asked Mrs. Cohen.

"I'm sure of it!" Mira answered. She turned to me then. "Seren, why don't you come tomorrow, too?" she asked. "They will be teaching us how to be good Christians."

"No, I'm not interested," I said.

"Why not? Do you want to be taken away like all the Jews in the villages?" she asked. "Who knows what happens to them!"

My mother's face, the faces of Herman and Tamara, of Rose and Eugene, of the children, flashed into my mind. Turning away from Mira, I walked quickly to the other side of the room and sat down by the open window, looking out over the piles of rubble. The words of the priest at the Gymnasium came into my mind: "Stay away from Jews on Passover. They'll kill you and mix your blood with matzos!" Shivering in the cool breeze that had blown in from the west, I closed the window and went to sit by Esther.

A few days later, at the end of June, someone knocked on our door one morning as we were beginning to awaken.

"I'll get it," Mrs. Cohen called. She stood by the door for a few minutes, her voice rising and falling excitedly. "No!" she said once and then I heard the low murmur of a man's voice again. Finally she closed the door, went to a chair and sank down into it, her face ashen.

"What's wrong, Mother?" Lily asked. "Who was that?"

Mrs. Cohen looked up at Lily, her eyes ringed with deep lines. "That was a man from the building committee with a new order from the National Guard." She began to speak softer so that I had to strain to hear her. "It's happened," she almost whispered. "They're coming to take us away. The committee must have everyone ready."

"Who, Mother? Who's coming?"

"The National Guard. In three days all the women between the ages of fifteen and fourty will be taken into a labor force . . . Oh, Lily . . . " she said louder, "that includes you!"

Lily ran into her mother's arms and began to weep loudly against her shoulder.

"What will happen to the children?" I asked. "Surely they won't be left alone?"

"No, no . . . " Mrs. Cohen continued. "The women who have small children won't be taken. They don't want to be bothered with old people or children. Zora and I will be left here alone."

Mrs. Cohen buried her face in Lily's hair. Each of us sat separate, looking into ourselves to see how we would summon up the courage to face the very thing we had dreaded for so long.

As we sat silently, Mira suddenly shouted, "Wait a minute! I won't have to go! I've converted. The priests will come and rescue me and the other Christians. You must have forgotten to tell us that. I'm so glad I remembered!"

Mrs. Cohen looked up. "No, nothing was said about Christians being excluded. The order stated that all women with no children would be taken."

"But the priest promised that we wouldn't be taken away from Budapest if we converted," Mira said. Her eyes reddened and angry tears burst from them. "It isn't fair!" she shouted.

Lily drew away from her mother's arms and looked into her eyes. "How can I leave you, Mother?" she asked. "I've never left you."

Her mother stroked Lily's hair for a few silent minutes. Then, turning to me, she said, "Lily's a very delicate child. She's so young . . .

All she's ever done is attend school. How will she be able to endure a labor camp? Why couldn't she stay here with Zora and me? Couldn't she? She doesn't look old. We could say that she's younger."

"No, she would be arrested and taken to prison," I said. "I'm sure they know exactly how many of us most report to them for the labor force. The police have each of us on file--our names, ages, addresses. Let her go with us. Esther and our friend, Ellen, are very young, too. We'll take care of her."

"There's nothing else we can do?" Mrs. Cohen asked.

"Nothing. I've been in a labor camp before. I know what to expect, what to take along. She'll be fine with us. In fact, I have something that will be perfect!"

Going to the closet, I took out the box of clothing Samuel had left

with me and found four pairs of trousers, one pair each for Esther, Ellen, Lily and me. "Girls," I said, "We're in luck. These will keep our legs from freezing."

"But they're mens' pants!" Esther said. "I've never worn pants in my life!"

"Is this a fashion show we're going to be in? No. We'll be outside in all kinds of weather. The trousers will keep us nice and warm!"

Esther and I tried on a pair. Hers almost fit. Mine hung like a sack and dragged on the floor behind me.

"Wouldn't Samuel laugh to see me now," I asked, "wearing his clothes?"

I paraded back and forth in front of the girls, stumbling along, almost falling once, until Esther and Ellen were doubled up in laughter.

"How can you act like this when in three days we'll be taken away?" Lily asked, beginning to cry again.

"Lily, Lily," I said. "We'll be back as soon as the war's over. They're inducting women now because all the men are already in the labor force. They need us for the war. We'll have to work hard but working is better than being in prison, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I've never been in prison. But I've never worked outside like a man before either."

"Working is better than prison, believe me! Now come here. I'll get you all fixed up."

Later in the day we were told to bring along a knapsack, warm clothing, cooking utensils and blankets. Remembering how cold the ground had been during those long months sleeping outside while I was in the special detail, I decided to bring more than blankets. Taking two down comforters that Mrs. Cohen let

us use and some water-proof material I had saved, I covered the comforters with the water-proofing. When I finished we had a portable bed large enough for the four of us. Let it rain and freeze! We would remain warm and dry.

At seven o'clock on a July morning, Esther, Ellen, Lily and I went down to the courtyard of our building to report to the Hungarian National Guard. Each of us was carrying on our backs a knapsack filled with extra clothing and cooking utensils or one of the comforters.

Hundreds of other women slowly made their way into the courtyard from the two main doors of the building. After a few minutes one of the soldiers ordered us to line up and then a reading of our names was begun. The soldiers yelled out a name, a woman answered and she was ordered to step forward. Finally, satisfied that each of us was accounted for, we were formed into lines and told to begin walking. I looked up and down the columns of marching women and was surprised to see how young they were; no woman was older than twenty-seven or twenty-eight and most of them were young girls of fifteen and sixteen.

We marched from apartment building to apartment building, collecting more soldiers and more women at each one. As we continued to walk, the blocks stretched into miles and we neared the edge of the city. Rain began to fall in a steady, cold pouring, running down over the faces of the women who had forgotten to wear hats or scarves. A young girl in front of me, her hair plastered to her head in long, dripping strings, began to cry. "I'm so tired . . . I'm so tired . . . " she said over and over. "We'll never stop walking! I'm so tired. . . . "

Finally the girl next to her said, "We should stop soon. It's growing dark."

"But I'm tired now!" the first girl replied. "I'm not used to walking.

Why couldn't they let us ride the streetcar? I can't keep up. I can't! This pack is too heavy."

In another minute she slid the knapsack from her back and let it fall to the ground. I had to step over it quickly to keep from stumbling.

Esther, who was walking on one side of me, said, "I think I'll throw away my knapsack, too. It's just too heavy."

"No, you won't!" I said. "You have one of the comforters. What will we sleep on? They won't give us beds! No, we don't throw away anything."

The young girl in front of us dropped back to walk between Lily and me. "Oh," she said, "even without the knapsack to carry I'm miserable. My feet feel like they're all blisters."

I looked down at her black dress shoes already caked with mud, the toes open and exposed.

"I didn't have any hiking shoes," she went on. "Why would I have hiking shoes? I'm not a country peasant. I'm not even a Jew! The police said that I am because my grandfather was part Jewish. But my parents are both Gentile. I'm a Gentile!"

She slowed her walk again and fell in line behind us, still talking to herself. We walked on through the falling rain, tripping over more and more knapsacks thrown down on the ground or flung into the ditches.

Finally at dusk as the rain was beginning to slow we came to Kishpest on the outskirts of Budapest. Here we entered a soccer field, walking out onto the rain-drenched grass, and stopped. I looked around, in all directions seeing women gathered in little groups of four or five or standing alone, lost in the sea of women. The soldiers of the National Guard who had marched beside us, among us, in front of us and behind us with raised bayonets now moved back and forth shouting, "We'll sleep here. Lay down! Lay down!"

We unrolled our comforters and spread one on the ground. Then we stretched out on it, the four of us fitting snugly, and pulled the other one over us. I gazed up at the stars beginning to appear in the sky and shining down upon us, on the women around us curled up on the soggy ground with nothing between them and the dampness, on the women beyond them crying into their coat sleeves, on all the thousands of women sprawled there in the night beginning to fall.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The following morning I awoke with a start. A jab of pain was darting through my left shoulder. Opening my eyes I saw a booted foot raised above me, poised to come down again on my arm. I sat up quickly and said to the soldier, "I'll wake the others. We'll get up."

He grunted, put his foot down on the ground and moved his thick, slow body to the next group of sleeping women. Then he turned around, stared and finally said in a flat, dragging tone, "Get ready to go."

He began walking once more, turned again, the creases in his fat neck folding into his flesh in deep, slanting lines. Then he plodded on.

Those women who still had knapsacks packed them hurriedly; those who did not stood quietly watching us, rubbing their stiff arms and legs. In a few minutes we were all in lines and walking out of the soccer field without anything to eat or drink and no idea of where we were going.

Once we were on the road the National Guard soldiers took the position they had the day before--marching on both sides of the road, bayonets raised, the women in the middle. All morning we marched on the road leading out of Budapest. In the middle of the afternoon we came to a wide, green, rolling field where cows would normally graze but I saw none, only broken fences and wood stakes sticking out of the ground at short intervals. We stopped and then, even before we had a chance to sit down, each of us was handed a shovel and told to go to the far end of the field to dig a pit for our toilet.

In about an hour we had the toilet dug but before we had a chance to relieve ourselves the soldiers ordered us back to the middle of the field and lined us up again. One of the soldiers began to shout, "You will dig trenches to trap enemy tanks. They must be three meters wide and three meters deep. You must complete one hundred trenches by nightfall. Failure to complete one hundred trenches will resort in punishment. The sites are marked with poles. Begin!"

Esther, Lily, Ellen and I grabbed hands, ran to one of the marked sites and began to dig. The ground was moist and soft at first and the digging was easy, like working in our garden at home, but as we reached below the area soaked with groundwater we came to hard, compacted dirt and our shovels hit against it with a clang, barely scraping away an inch or two at a time. The soldiers, who were standing over us with their rifles aimed at our backs, began to shout, "Faster, you bitches! Work, you lazy, Jew whores!"

I was working beside Lily and she cringed, covering her ears with her hands.

"I can't stand it," she gasped. "I have never been called such names." Tears ran down her face and fell onto her hands already blistered and raw.

"Keep working," I said. "Please, Lily. Dig!"

She bent over her shovel again and resumed digging. "I am not a whore!" she said, the tears still falling.

"Of course you're not!" I said. "Just keep digging."

An hour passed, two. The blisters in the crease of my right hand between my thumb and first two fingers puffed up until they broke, the raw skin burning each time I pushed against the shovel, and still we dug. There were about twenty of us working on this trench and we had by now removed two

heads. I looked up to see a soldier shooting his gun over the pit.

"Faster, you lazy bitches!" he yelled. "Next time I'll shoot you. It's not deep enough. Faster!"

We willed our arms to continue moving up and down, trying to ignore the aches of our shoulders and backs. It made no difference. Again the soldiers yelled, "Faster! Faster!" Finally we were told to climb out of the hole and ordered to line up beside the trench we had just dug. One of the men stepped forward from the group of soldiers facing us. "You haven't finished the trench!" he shouted. "You will be punished!"

We were marched back to the area where we had left our knapsacks, trembling, realizing for the first time that we were alone in the middle of a barren field, surrounded by soldiers who wished us all dead.

Later that evening we were taken to the end of the field where a kitchen had been set up and given a cup of vegetable soup and a piece of bread. As our group was near the beginning of the line, we were served. Those at the end reached the serving area to discover that the food was all gone.

As we went to sit down, Lily said, "I don't think I can eat. Those soldiers! They frighten me so." She stared at her food for a long while and then hunger overcame her. She ate, as we all did; it was the first meal we had received since leaving Budapest. After supper a great exhaustion overcame us and we unrolled our comforters and went to sleep immediately.

When I awoke in the morning the pressure inside my bowels was so great that I could think of nothing else. I decided to try again to see if I could relieve myself. The procedure was the same; a guard marched behind me and then stood near, his bayonet drawn. Again I squatted at the edge of the pit. I could not relax. I gave up trying and rejoined the others.

"I'm very constipated," I whispered to Ellen. "I think I'll explode.'

"You have to go," she answered. "You'll get sick!"

"I can't. I just can't."

"Why does a soldier have to go with us?" she asked.

"I don't know. We're homeless. We have no identification. Who would take us if we did try to run away? Where would we go?"

That day passed the same as the one before. We worked all day in the trenches as the soldiers shouted, "Faster! Faster! Faster!" firing their guns repeatedly over our heads. In the middle of the afternoon a girl who was digging on the other side of our group next to Esther suddenly pitched forward in the dirt, falling down on her face, arms raised above her. Long, dark hair fanned out around her head, around the shoulders of her brown coat, trailed through the fresh, loosened dirt.

"Damn you, son of a bitch!" a soldier shouted down. "Get up!"

She continued to lie there, soundlessly.

He yelled again, his gun pointed directly at her back. "Get up, bitch! Now!"

The little finger on her left hand moved once very slightly. The gun fired--one! two! three! four!--opening holes in the back of her coat. The girl lay perfectly still.

"Pick her up!" the same soldier yelled.

Several women on the other side of her gently lifted her body and as they did, her head rolled back. Lily gasped, grabbing my hand. The dead girl was the same one who, walking beside us with dress shoes and no hat, threw her knapsack away when it became too heavy as we left Budapest. She had lasted for two days.

"Work!" a soldier yelled. "Faster!"

We jammed our shovels into the hard earth, the dead girl passing from hand to hand above our heads until she was lifted out of the trench. When we climbed out that evening she was almost buried under a pile of dirt scooped out by our shovels and we would not have known she was there except for one hand reaching out from under the mound of dirt, palm up, the fingers spread wide.

The next morning when I awoke I was in so much pain that I could barely walk. Summoning a soldier, I went again to the toilet pit. I sat there in the pale, cold light, a woman straining on each side of me, and tried to let go, tried again and again, until tears were squeezed from my eyes from the effort, but I could not. "I will die if I don't," I thought.

Evening came after another day of digging trenches. I decided that I had to let go. That night I strained against the blocking stone until I was soaked with sweat and dizzy with exhaustion. It came out. The body can become accustomed to almost anything.

Throughout the month of July we moved back and forth across the plains of Hungary, digging ever more trenches for the tanks of the enemy that came not on land but by air. The weather grew hot. At night the heat lessened somewhat and we found comfort in the cool darkness of sleep, rising in the mornings like horses in a pasture to shake the collected moisture from our hair. Often, though, when I looked out across the expanse of women beginning to stir in the early light, I could count twenty or thirty who did not rise, remaining curled up on the ground, dead. If we were moving to a new location that day they were left as they were, covered with early morning dew, their bodies no more than small mounds on the grassy field.

These women, most of them still very young, had not been able to see an end to our life of slavery. "Will we ever sleep between linens again in our own beds?" they had asked themselves. "Eat at a table? Comb and wash our matted hair? Bathe our bodies reeking from sweat and dirt and our own excrement?" "Never," they answered and crept off to death while the rest of us slept on beneath the night sky.

We who numbered about ten thousand women at the beginning of July were down to nine thousand by the end. Over and over we were counted, once every morning, once every night. Sometimes the counting was interrupted by the roar of planes overhead and we were ordered to lie down. If we were camped near Budapest the bombing was more intense. At night we looked out from our comforters into a sky blazing with explosions of light as "Stalin candles" were dropped over the city. A few minutes later the bombs detonated and the earth exploded all around us; the ground shook, the smell of burning drifted over us and the entire sky was on fire. In the mornings we went out again, half-drugged from lack of sleep, and were marched into the city to clean up the debris.

As we approached Budapest one day an explosion suddenly ripped into a line of women. Someone had stepped on a mine and two or three women were blown apart. A few young girls began to scream, collapsing on the ground amid the bloody fragments of body and bone. Immediatedy a great mass of soldiers converged on the fallen girls and ordered them to get up. They remained on the ground, their heads buried in their arms, sobbing hysterically. Then an older woman beside them went to the girls and began to lift one up in her arms. Another woman joined the first and in a few minutes all of the girls were on their feet again. The marching resumed.

When we reached Budapest, walking through blocks of nothing but broken bricks crumpled together into heaps two or three stories high, we were forced to clean the streets. Sometimes a solitary building was left standing in the middle of a block while all around it only the scarred earth remained. One day we came upon an entire stretch of nothing but the exposed shells of buildings, walls sloping down at angles from the open rafters to the base, standing like ruins in an ancient city. Two or three times we came upon water gushing from a broken pipe and hurriedly splashed our grimy faces and arms. Once I even found a sliver of soap amid the rubble and knew again the pleasure of having clean hands. At night we were brought out again to a field outside the city and here we ate supper and slept. When the streets were clear we moved into the countryside again.

Often as we worked in the fields, digging into the dark earth, we heard the low whistle of a train from far away and then the steady chugging of the engine, the clacking of the wheels against the rails. Stealing glances whenever I could, I watched these long, long trains running day and night. If we marched in the dark a trail of orange and yellow sparks burned away into blackness, the train passing close to us and then receding into the night. Sometimes it was made up entirely of freight cars, sealed and bolted. At other times passenger car after passenger car rolled by, the faces of mothers and their children pressed tightly against the glass, looking out at us.

"Where do you think all those trains are going?" Esther asked me one night as we lay on our comforter beside Ellen and Lily.

"I don't know," I answered.

"The people on them are Jewish, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"You don't think that Mama is on one of those trains, do you? It would be so terrible if she was going right by us and we didn't know."

"It would be just as bad for us . . . to have her so near and not know," I said, hearing the rumbling of an approaching train.

"Let's not even imagine it," she said, turning over to go to sleep. "Mama is safe. She's fine."

A few nights later as I was beginning to drift into sleep I heard a man's voice calling. I lay there, startled. Who would be out there on the other side of the field? Then I heard it again, louder, stronger. "Deborah Eliad . . . Deborah Eliad . . . Deborah Eliad," it called.

Another voice from the same, distant place began to call, "Eloise Eskin . . . Eloise Eskin . . . Eloise Eskin . . . "

By now many of the other women were sitting up on their blankets and looking around, frightened. Had the ghosts come to call on us lying there all alone under the cold stars? Then a woman from somewhere behind us called out, "I'm Eloise Eskin . . . I'm Eloise . . . Who's calling me?"

"Norman Eskin," the voice called back. "Norman Eskin . . . "

"Father!" the woman yelled. "I am Eloise."

My eyes filled with tears. My father would never call me again.

"Who are those men out there?" Esther asked.

"Could it be the men's labor force?" Ellen answered.

"It could be!" Esther said. "They must be camped on the other side of the clearing.

I thought of all those I knew who might be in the group: Samuel, my brothers Eliezer and Shlomo, the men who had worked near Valea Uzului several

years ago. Perhaps someone would call me. Perhaps someone would remember me!

Soon a jumble of voices filled the air. Names of women drifted over the field in low voices reaching out into the night; flying back in high arcs lilting across the low shrubs, the grassy hillocks, were the names of men. "Adam Davidow . . . Adam Davidow . . . Adam Davidow . . ." a woman next to me kept calling. I lay there for hour after hour hearing names all night long, but not my name. No one called me.

The following evening it was the same. Voices reached out through the dead night until they found someone--touched them. A woman who had felt so alone that she sometimes thought of falling down and letting herself be shot now heard the voice of a loved man calling to her out of the blackness and was alone no longer. Again I listened for my name. I did not hear it.

The summer stretched on. We walked across Hungary through the hot, dusty months--sometimes by day, sometimes by night. If the bombings were severe during the daylight hours we went at night, covering the long miles in darkness. After a night march we set up the camp and were ordered to begin digging the toilet pit and tank trenches immediately, sometimes without food, always without rest. Women continued to die.

One evening we were camped outside Budapest near Cvespol where an airplane factory was located and the bombing was particularly heavy, the explosions so near that fragments of metal came hurtling through our camp. I looked for something to cover my head but could find nothing other than the knapsack which was soft and would not have given me much protection. Then I remembered the cooking pots. We had been carrying them all over Hungary and had not used them once. Quickly I took a black kettle with a long handle from

my knapsack and put it over my head. It fit perfectly. When Ellen saw me she burst out laughing.

"Have you gone crazy?" she asked. "Or is this the latest fashion for labor camps?"

"You can laugh all you want," I said, "but my head will not be knocked off by a bomb."

Esther looked at me, her mouth open. "But what if a bomb falls on your foot?" she asked. "Maybe you should wear the pot on your foot."

"I can live without a foot," I said. "I can't live without a head." I curled up to go to sleep, still wearing the pot. In the morning when I awoke I saw Ellen, Lily and Esther all wearing pots on their heads, the handles sticking out behind them.

As summer waned our work did not seem quite as hard as before; perhaps we were used to it by now. Our hands had developed thick, hard callouses and the muscles in our backs and arms ceased to ache throughout the nights. On the long walks along the roads from one camp location to another we began to find here and there along the wayside small gifts of food left for us by the Hungarian people: a loaf of bread, some boiled eggs, a few cooked potatoes. When one of our group was able to pick up one of these gifts she shared it with the rest of us. We walked along together, nibbling at our prize, and felt a little less lonely, knowing that someone in the countryside cared about us.

The calling back and forth between the men's camp and ours resumed when we were camped next to each other outside Budapest. Again many of the women heard their names and felt comforted hearing the voices of loved ones separated from them. Every night for a week I listened for my name, lying

there in the dark night for hours hearing names: fathers calling for their daughters, husbands for their wives, brothers for their sisters, young men for their sweethearts. Each night I thought, "No one calls for me. Not a single person. Doesn't anyone remember me? Not one?" I fell asleep, listening to the names drifting above me. When I awoke in the morning I thought, "Maybe tonight someone will call my name," and went to work, hopeful.

One night as I was lying there listening, almost despairing of ever hearing my name, I heard, "Sereń Tuvel" come across through the jumble of voices. "No," I thought. "It was another name that sounds like mine." Then I heard it again, "Sereń Tuvel . . . Sereń Tuvel. . . . " It was my name! I wanted to jump up and run to the men's camp to find out who was calling me.

"I am here . . . Sereń Tuvel . . . Sereń Tuvel . . . " I called back.

There was no answer.

I called again, louder. "This is Sereń! Sereń Tuvel!"

A deep voice shouted back, "Sereń."

It was Joseph, Herman and Tamara's youngest son! He was one of the last persons I expected to hear. "Why does he call me?" I wondered. "He is much younger than me. Esther is more his age."

"Joseph Tuvel," I yelled back. "Joseph Tuvel . . . "

Again and again I called out his name and while he may have answered, I could not tell. All around me women were shouting; names were jumbled, scattered, lost amid the strained cacaphony of voices. After a half hour I quit calling his name and lay down to sleep. To think that Joseph had called me! I had always assumed that he never felt any affection for me; I was nothing more to him than an older aunt he had to tolerate. But he called me! I was not forgotten. Oh, I was not forgotten!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Late one night we were marched into the blackness of Budapest, walking through the silent streets until we found ourselves climbing an incline. Like animals being herded up a chute we were shoved against each other in the pitch dark, stumbling over women who had fallen and had no chance to rise again. The four of us clasped hands so tightly that our fingers seemed welded together.

"Where are we going? What's happening?" Esther cried.

"I think we must be going up into a building," I told her. "Hang on! Don't let go of my hand whatever you do!"

In a few minutes we found ourselves crammed into a narrow ledge inside the building, a railing on one side of us and a wall on the other. We could see nothing, determining our surroundings entirely by touch. Still clasping hands, Esther, Ellen, Lily and I struggled to find a place where we would not be shoved against from all sides. Putting my free hand in front of me I felt the air and inched slowly forward. My hand bumped against a cold, rounded structure and then another like it. "Pipes," I thought. "They must run along the side of the building. Maybe we can squeeze into the space next to them." Pulling the other three along behind me, I eased between two pipes. There was not enough room to sit comfortably, but the four of us nestled amid the cold columns, out of the way of the screaming women who continued to fall over each other. As soon as we were settled, I took off my shoes and tried to place them beside my feet. Before I realized it the left shoe was gone. I felt a hole beside the pipe where my shoe should have been.

"Be careful!" I cried out. "This place is full of holes. My shoe just went down one."

"What will you do now?" Ellen asked. "You have only one shoe."

"Who says I have only one?" I asked. "Why do you think I carry around this knapsack?"

In the morning we were marched out of the building, which we saw to be a brick factory in the dim light, I wearing a hiking boot on my right foot, an oxford on the left. Every day after that we walked. We did not dig any more trenches but marched ever to the east past rolling fields of wheat ripening in the yellow sun, past corn stretching in rows like waves on an emerald sea, marching in the sun, in the moonlight, in the cool, cricket-singing air, marching ever away from Budapest. One day we were told we were going to a factory on the border between Hungary and Germany, the next day we were told that we were being relocated, the third day it was the factory again.

In the late afternoon of a day three weeks after we began marching away from Budapest, we reached the border patrolled by soldiers of the German National Guard all wearing swastikas on their sleeves. We crossed the border and marched a few more kilometers to the depot of a small town in Austria. A long, dark passenger train was steaming on the tracks.

"Get on the train! Hurry!" the soldiers yelled suddenly.

The masses of women became a mob surging towards the cars. Anxious to be out of the wind and the rain, to sit down, they pressed against us from all sides. I grabbed Esther by one hand and Lily by the other. "Get Ellen!" I yelled to Esther.

"I have her!" she yelled back. "She's here!"

The four of us, Ellen first, then Esther, then myself and Lily last clung to each other's hands so tightly that the bones of our fingers seemed to be breaking. From behind us, from every side of us, women were falling against our backs, against our hands, pushing us forward. Ellen reached the steps leading up to a platform on the train and pulled Esther behind her as she stumbled up the stairs, looking back to make sure that we were all still together. I shoved forward, squeezing Lily's hand even tighter. "Oh, you're hurting me!" she cried. In another instant we were up the steps and being pulled into the interior of the train.

Two rows ahead of us I saw a long empty bench on the left. "Ellen!" I shouted. "There--to the left!"

She veered toward the empty bench throwing the weight of her body out from the onrushing flow of women. The four of us heaved into the waiting space, collapsing with a heavy thud on the hard wood.

"My hand!" Lily gasped. "The fingers are so twisted I can hardly bend them."

I looked down at my own hand to see why it was still hurting. The ring Samuel had given to me was pressed hard into the flesh, the joint red and swollen.

The women were still streaming past us, their faces anxious, eyes darting over the filled benches as each woman looked for a place where she would fit in, belong.

"Look!" Esther shouted. "Isn't that Mira from our apartment? It is! Mira! Over here!"

Mira turned from the flow and eased to the side, pulling another girl with her. Moving closer together, we made room for the two of them at the end

of our seat. We were now sitting so constricted that I could not move my arm without bumping into Esther on one side or Lily on the other.

"This is crazy!" Mira exclaimed.

"Have you been with us all this time?" I asked. "I haven't seen you since we left our room in the apartment building."

"Yes," she answered. "Delia and I have been together. Do you remember her? She lived in the room next to us."

"I recognize your face," I said to Delia.

"Where do you suppose they're taking us now?" Mira asked. "I think it's to a factory," she continued without waiting for an answer. "I don't believe any of those stories about resettling us all somewhere in Germany. Why would the Germans stick us away somewhere when they could still get more work out of us?"

While she was speaking ever more women had been streaming by us, but now the surging stopped abruptly.

"The other door is locked!" a woman in the aisle next to our seat was shouting. "Turn around! The door is locked!"

Slowly the mass of women shifted so that they were facing the other way, the direction from which they had come. As they began to edge towards the door, the harsh, metallic clanking of a bolt being shoved into place was heard at both ends of the car. We were locked inside. The women still standing in the aisle looked bewildered. The seats were filled, the exits bolted. As the train suddenly moved forward with a jerk the women began to scream, clinging to each other's backs and shoulders to keep from being trampled among the mass of bodies. Then as the train began to pull out of the station, one by one the women worked their way in between the rows of seats

and eased themselves into the spaces on the floor. A tall woman wearing a thick, black coat sank in front of me, squashing my left foot.

"Excuse me," I said to her. "You're sitting on my foot."

She half-turned to look at me, her eyes dull, eyelids lowered, and then turned back again without moving.

"I suppose she imagines that I am comfortable sitting up here," I thought, "even though I can barely move." I wiggled my foot loose until it was wedged between her and the woman sitting at Esther's feet. The train jolted again and slowly rolled out of the station.

Night came, darkness total inside the locked cars as the train moved on, our bodies swaying back and forth against each other. Unable to sleep, I looked out past the window into the blackness, waiting for the towns and villages to pass by the glass. First I would see a flicker of light on a hillside, another, then a sprinkling of lights as the train neared a stop. Finally we pulled into a city. The stations would be stirring with activity even in the middle of the night; German soldiers from other trains ran back and forth to the faucets always left running so they could quickly fill their canteens and board the trains again. When we began moving once more I dozed off, only to wake with a start when the train began to slow for the next station.

In the morning the locked door at one end of the car opened and two guards entered and began to pass out chunks of dry, dark bread and small slabs of brown cheese.

"I was wondering if they would ever feed us," Ellen said, rubbing her eyes. "I'm so hungry."

"I would rather have something to drink," Lily answered. "Do you think they will bring us any water? They will, won't they? They couldn't refuse us that."

By now I knew that anything, everything could be denied us, even our lives; I was not convinced that we were being taken to a factory to work but I saw no reason to alarm the others, so I said nothing.

As the day wore on I began to crave a drink of water. Normally I went for days without one, sometimes not even drinking liquids with my meals. While we were in the fields the other women became so thirsty from working in the hot sun, the dust and dirt flying about their heads, that they could barely speak. At night they could not drink enough water with the evening meal, while I drank a cupfull and was satisfied. Now, however, I could not get the thought of quenching my thirst out of my mind.

The air was becoming increasingly rank. When I reached to open a window it would not budge; like the doors, it was locked. "We will all suffocate in here!" I thought. Glancing out the window I saw that we had pulled into another station. Several guards had jumped from the train platform and hurried to the faucet running, running, the stream of fresh, cool water coursing to the ground. "No, I won't look," I decided and turned my head away. As the train began to leave the station my eyes stole back to the faucet. It was still splashing, the water from the flowing stream bubbling into the drain.

The next morning and every morning thereafter we were given the same meal of dry bread, cheese and once in a while, a cup of cold coffee. Seeing the guards each day pushing through over the women sitting in the aisles, I thought, "I won't eat today. It will make me even more thirsty." When a guard reached me, however, my stomach cried out, rubbing against itself, and I grabbed the bread and cheese before he had passed by. I ate and was even more thirsty.

The women on the floor at our feet began to complain. "How can you be so selfish?" one asked me. "Let me sit on the seat for once!"

"She's right!" the woman beside her said, looking up at Lily with dark, angry eyes. "You're no better than us, are you? Well, are you!"

Lily looked at me, her eyes wide and blinking rapidly behind her thick glasses.

"Do you want to change with them?" I asked her.

She continued to look at me and then nodded her head.

"Come on, girls," I said. "To the floor."

With a great deal of stepping on each other's feet and hands the six of us on the seat managed to trade positions with the women on the floor. Just as we were all settled Lily said, "I have to use the toilet. I've waited for a long time . . . "

"All right," I answered. "We'll go."

As the four of us had made it a practice to never be separated from each other, our clasped hands the links between us, we and Mira and Delia went together to the toilet at the end of the car. A chorus of "Watch outs!" followed us all the way there as we climbed over the backs and heads and feet packed solidly together. We arrived only to find that the toilet had become blocked and feces were piled up almost to the rim of the bowl. The stench was overwhelming. When Lily saw it she shuddered, her face blanched and she held a hand to her mouth.

"I'll go first," Ellen said and took her turn. Finally, after the rest were through, Lily gingerly lowered herself.

When we returned to our place in the car we found that other women were sitting where we had been, easing themselves into it from the crowded aisle.

"I think I see a place over there," Mira's friend said, pointing to the front of the car.

Threading our way as carefully as possible we climbed over the women in the aisle again and finally collapsed against the side of the train in the area behind the last row of seats. Slightly more room was available here, as no seat pushed up against us. Ellen began undoing her knapsack and pulled out one of the comforters.

"Why sit on the hard floor?" she asked and slid the comforter under us.

"What a good idea," I said, smiling. "I'm almost comfortable. Do you have some water for us, too?"

"No," she said, smiling back.

We leaned against each other and closed our eyes, the clicking of the rails lulling us into a soft doze. I began to dream. A woman was singing, the notes rising up strong and clear, rising like thrushes, lifting me with them above the cars, above the long body of the train, above the hills turning white with frost, above the pale clouds of snow drifting over the forests.

"It's Tamara!" I thought in my dream. "I'm at home and she's come to sing for us in the evening beside the fire."

The voice sang on, now in Hungarian. It was no longer the voice of Tamara but I did not mind. The song was one a lover would sing to her beloved softly, at the closing of the day.

I awoke with a jolt. The train had stopped again.

"Isn't her voice lovely?" Esther was saying.

"Did you hear it, too?" I whispered, looking at her quickly.

"Of course. We all did. The woman who is singing is sitting only four rows ahead of us. Mira says that she heard her sing in an opera in Budapest."

"Then it wasn't a dream . . . "

"What wasn't?" Esther asked.

"Nothing . . . " I closed my eyes, hoping to be carried out of the train once more. In a few minutes I heard the voice again. I knew that I was awake this time and strained to see who was singing.

"I remember so well the time I saw here," Mira was saying. "My father took me to 'The Magic Flute' on my fourteenth birthday. This woman had the leading role. Her dress was pink--yards and yards of pink satin. I decided to become an opera star just like her. Now look at me! My hair is so dirty and matted I can't even run my fingers through it."

The song began again. It did not matter that we did not even know the singer's name. We stopped talking, the car became perfectly still and she sang.

"I am lonely," I thought. "I am afraid."

"Let me sing for you," the opera singer seemed to answer. "Perhaps it will ease your sorrow."

For two weeks I counted the dreary nights, the days; fourteen days without water. After that I lost track of the time. The train continued to stop and start, stop and start, sometimes remaining at one location for days at a time, the soldiers to jump off and fill their canteens at the faucets ever gushing. The doors and windows remained locked. No woman was allowed off the train unless she was dead. A few did succumb to the thirst, the stifling, the wretched smells. The rest of us became one with the hard, wooden seats or the floor. Every time I awoke after a few hours of fitful sleep I could not move without a great amount of pain that permeated my sore legs, back, stiff shoulders and neck.

"I ache. Oh, I ache," Esther moaned over and over. We were going

into the third week on the train and sitting again on a bench, I squeezed next to the window. We seemed to be traveling east as far as I could tell from the direction of the sun. The signs at the stations were all in German. Every depot had the faucet open wide, the water pouring out.

One day late in the afternoon as the sun beat in through the window-pane my head began to grow heavy, thick; my tongue to feel like it was tasting sand. The inside of my throat began to close and I became terrified that I would not be able to swallow. Water suddenly began to pour into my mouth. I held it open as wide as I could, stretched, taut, the liquid pouring, pouring, ever flowing into my mouth. The cool, silvery wetness ran over my chapped lips, over the blistered lining of my throat, and slid down the red, dusty valley of my gullet to my chest. It cooled, cooled, cleansed, satisfied as nothing had ever done before. Still I drank, mouth open, never choking, on and on, the water having no end.

A screeching of the wheels jarred me back into consciousness. Thrown back against the edge of the seat, my mouth was open, my tongue sticking to the bottom lip, my throat raw and burning.

"Sereń! Sereń! Are you all right?" Esther was asking, touching my shoulder.

I could not talk, I nodded my head.

"You were delirious," she said. "I couldn't wake you."

I turned from her, remembering the sensation of the delicious, sweet water gurgling down my throat, A drop of moisture fell onto my lips. It tasted of salt.

Outside the window a child, a small girl of four or five dressed in a red coat and hat and black boots, skipped along on the platform beside her

mother. Seeing a vendor on the other end of the station, the little girl pulled her mother to him and danced around the vendor while he prepared a cup of juice for her. Handing it to her with a smile, he tipped his hat; she laughed and then went with her mother, holding the cup carefully in one hand. "Thank God I don't have a child," I thought. "I'm so glad that I never married and had children. How unbearable it would be to be locked on this train with a child crying for a drink of water."

Then one day when we were traveling through a forest, pine trees stretching away from the window for as far as I could see, the train slowed and came to a standstill.

"Where are we?" Ellen asked. "There is no station."

"I can't tell," Mira answered. "It looks like nothing but a forest. I don't see any buildings."

A great sense of hopelessness overcame me. "Everything is ending," I thought. "We are in the middle of nothingness. They have brought us all the way here to the middle of a deep forest to shoot us. Who will stop them? Who can save us now?"

"Everyone out!" the German soldiers began to yell.

We started to rise, barely able to move our legs; they had turned into boards while we were not looking.

"Hurry! Hurry!" the guards shouted.

A line of women began to move towards an exit, carrying their blankets and knapsacks in their arms.

"No!" the soldiers shouted. "Leave everything! Out!"

We put our knapsacks back down on the seats. My suspicions were confirmed; the soldiers were going to shoot us. Dead women did not need blankets,

extra clothing and their mother's rings. I said nothing. There was no need for the others to also feel the fear tearing at my own heart.

As soon as we struggled down the steps, breathing fresh air for the first time since we boarded the train, we were ordered to line up, five to a row, and to begin marching. The four of us, hands clasped, formed a line beside a young girl. At first many of the women stumbled, clutching each other's arms so they would not fall. The ground was rough, sticks poking up at our feet. After the hot, staleness of our compartment, the air outside was biting and cold. Half an hour of marching passed; they did not order us to halt as I expected. "Maybe they want to take us far from the railroad tracks so no one will find our bodies," I thought. We marched for several hours more until darkness was beginning to creep through the bottom of the trees, the pale light rapidly receding from the trees' crowns. The cold grew more intense and I began to shiver inside my coat. "We will never stop marching," I thought. "Through all eternity we will be marching."

Then I saw it--a bit of red and yellow between the trees. What was it? We marched closer. We were approaching a huge gate with a sign hanging suspended over the top. As we drew nearer I could read the words printed in huge letters on the sign: "Das ist dein tot" (This is your death). Below the words was an enormous insect painted in garish red and bright yellow. A long, flat body with a small pointed head and six legs, each with a hook on the end, crawled across the sign.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"A louse," Ellen answered.

We halted before the gate briefly and then marched on, coming after a few minutes to another gate and another huge sign. This one read: "Arbeit

macht das leben suess" (Work makes life sweet). Stretching out from the gate on both sides were high walls with barbed wire above them, extending so far in both directions that I could see no end to them. Again we were ordered to halt briefly and then marched on beneath the gate, beneath the sign promising us a pleasant life. We passed through, the guards hurrying us inside with their raised rifles, and the gate clanked shut behind us.

We were lined up alongside a road coming from the other end of the camp. The light had faded to a dull gray but I could still make out the forms of women slowly dragging by on the road. Some of them were carrying buckets, some hoes. As I stared at them in the dim light, the women's pace seemed to slacken even more, their feet barely leaving the surface of the road. One foot moved forward, then the other, slowly, slowly, heads dropped, arms hung loosely at their sides. When one group of women had passed another began, row after row coming by, ever coming by--women with green, red or purple markings on their coat sleeves, women barely more than children, old women.

"This can't be true!" I thought. "I'm having another nightmare. When I wake up all this will be gone and I'll be back on the train."

Then as the last group of women passed us, the sounds of their shuffling feet fading into the black night, a guard ordered us to enter a low, gray building across the road. I followed the row of women ahead of me into the building.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Nach rechts! . . . Nach links! . . . Nach rechts! . . . Nach links! . . . " a woman guard was ordering as we approached the building; alternate lines of women were being sent to the right and to the left. Our line went to the right, the four of us and twenty-five or thirty other women entering a large, open room with low, wooden benches all along one wall. The air was chilly, the floor damp, shallow puddles here and there darkening the cement. While we were nearly beyond thirst after more than two weeks of being deprived of almost all water, for an instant I visualized sprawling on the floor, lapping up the few drops of water with my tongue.

"Achtung! Achtung!" a voice began shouting. I turned to look in the direction from which the voice was coming. A person wearing blue-gray pants and a jacket with a green triangle and bar sewn on the sleeve was speaking. The soldiers of the German National Guard who had accompanied us on the train and during the march into the camp had evidentally turned us over to these camp guards.

"Achtung!" the voice commanded again. While the voice was deep and harsh the face was soft, intriguing; I could not tell whether a man or a woman was speaking. We were ordered to form lines and to undress completely for a bath.

"A bath!" Ellen whispered to me. "I can't believe it."

Neither could I. The accumulated grime and dust had been now so mingled with the secretions of our bodies that the creases in our necks,

wrists and ankles held solid lines of dirt embedded into the skin.

What was the most disheartening, however, was my hair. Since I was seven or eight I had washed it often, immensely enjoying combing out the damp, wet strands and letting them dry on my back into a flowing mass of waves. Now my hair protruded from my head in thick, twisted coils, matted and oily. When I tried to comb it with my fingers I was stopped by tangled snarls. "Maybe they will even give us combs," I thought, picturing my hair soft and sweet-smelling once more.

The women began to undress, glancing quickly at the guards as they unbuttoned their blouses and slipped off one sleeve. We were ordered to fold our coats, pants, blouses, sweaters, skirts, socks and underwear and place them in piles at our feet. Our shoes were to be set to one side. When I had finished undressing I was so cold that I could not stop shivering. The windows were broken and the wind was blowing in on us in strong gusts. Glancing around the room covertly, I saw one girl with trembling arms crossed over her breasts while another was bent over, arms folded tightly together. Several women still held on to the last piece of clothing they had taken off--an undershirt, a white pair of underpants--and draped it over the lower part of their bodies. The two guards stood together in the front, arms around each other's waists.

"Beilen Sie sich!" shouted one of the guards. As I understood German, I realized that she was telling us to hurry. Most of the women, however, spoke only Hungarian and could only guess what they were being ordered to do. One by one the women still holding onto a piece of clothing met the narrowed eyes of a guard staring at her and let the garment fall.

Two more guards wearing the same uniform entered the room, one carrying scissors, the other a bowl of water and a razor. Walking up to the first row

of women, the guard with a scissors grabbed the hair of the woman first in line with her left hand; with the right she made one, quick cut at the base of the neck. A mass of black hair fell away. The guard walked to the front of the room, threw the shorn-off hair on a bench and went back to the same woman. Her scissors moved quickly; here, there andthere a chop was made. Disparate tufts stuck out in one place while in another the hair was cut so close that the whiteness of the scalp was visible.

The guard moved on down the line of women in front of me, making separate piles in front of the room: one for blonde hair, one for brown, one for chestnut, one for black.

When the guard reached our row she quickly slashed off Ellen's hair, Esther's and Lily's; I was next. She grabbed me with a hard yank that hurt deeply, as if she were pulling my hair out by the roots, and then paused for a minute.

"Just look at this!" she yelled.

"Who is she talking to?" I wondered. The women in front of me turned around to look.

The guard with the razor walked over to us from the opposite end of the room. Her hands were covered with curly hair. "Hah!" she laughed. "Isn't she a fine one!"

The first guard took her scissors and made several quick, sawing movements. My hair fell into her hand. Four more rapid snips were made around my head and finally the guard walked to the blonde pile and threw my hair on it with a careless toss. It began to slide from the top of the pile, slowly at first and then, picking up speed, tumbled to the floor, landing in front of the bench. The guard, going by with a length of black hair, gave it a kick with her boot.

A hot burning stung my eyelids. Tears gathering behind them pushed out in clusters, collected in the lower portions of my eyes. I could not pull my gaze away from my hair. Finally I forced myself to look at the other women huddled into themselves, shivering, diminished, like sheep after a shearing. One woman had no hair at all except for a tuft sticking straight up from the top of her head. Another had a short stubble over one ear, a longer layer above the other. I could only guess at my own appearance but I imagined jagged lines, ragged edges.

As I stood there, drawn deep inside myself, the other guard approached and ordered me to spread my legs apart. My body obeyed; my mind remained dark, numbed. I felt a sharp pull on my pubic hairs followed by a biting pain as a razor made two, three swipes across. The guard moved on, swishing her razor in a bowl of water black with hair, traces of red floating on the dirty scum. I looked at my legs. A trickle of blood was easing down the inside of one calf. "I would almost rather die than suffer this," I thought and crept back into the softness inside my head.

The piles of clothes at our feet were picked up and put into large bins at one end of the room. A few minutes later wooden crates were brought into the room and a guard began to move down the rows. Each woman was handed an undershirt, regardless of its size. I was given a gray, soiled piece of thin cotton that hung to my feet. Next the guards came down the rows with crates of dresses; again we were given whichever piece of clothing was closest to the guard's reach. A dark green jersey dress, the kind of garment an older woman might have worn to an afternoon tea in Budapest, was thrust at me. Across the front and the back were large stripes made of a dark cloth and sewn on so that a large X was made both across my chest and back. All of the other

dresses bore the same markings. It slid over my head and fell about my ankles, the waist coming almost to my knees, slippery and cool on my body. I began to shake, trembling violently, moving my hands up and down my arms, trying to warm them. Lily, who was standing immediately to my right, must have touched Esther beside her and pointed to me; Esther and I never lined up directly next to each other for fear that we would be recognized as sisters and separated.

"Are you all right?" Esther whispered across to me.

I nodded my head, glancing at her. I was relieved to see that she had been given a woolen dress. The right sleeve was torn, the midriff was soiled and there were several holes in the skirt, but it would be warm.

The guards came through again handing out coats. I could not understand at first why they took away all of our clothes only to give us in return garments that must have been worn by other women entering the camp. As I looked around, however, at the women beside me withdrawn into their meager, worn rags, I saw that we were no longer the strong women who had been able to endure hard labor, wartime conditions and separation from our families and friends. The shearing of our heads and vulvas, the robbing of our clothes and everything we had owned, took from us the last traces of who we had been. My knapsack on the train, my mother's chains and rings, would never be given back. I felt their loss almost as much as the loss of my hair. All I had left was Samuel's ring.

When the guard reached me she held out a long gray coat. Without thinking I took it from her with my right hand. Immediately the guard circled the ring with her fingers and thumb, giving it a hard yank. My finger felt as if it were being pulled from me. The ring would not come off. Her grip tightened; the flesh around the ring was squeezed tightly. I cried out in pain.

"Quiet!" she hissed.

Again she pulled, spitting on the ring twice while she wiggled it back and forth. Finally, in one smooth movement, she scraped it over the ridge of my knuckle and slipped it off the end of my finger and into her pocket. Quickly she glanced around. Satisfied that no one had seen her, she shoved her crate of coats forward and moved on.

One more time a guard passed through our lines. Each of us was given two red, cloth triangles with numbers at the top, two yellow cloth triangles, two strips of yellow cloth and a needle and thread. We were instructed to sew one red triangle on the sleeve of our coat, the other on the sleeve of our dress and then to sew the yellow triangles crossing them, forming Stars of David. The yellow bars were to go beneath the stars. When we were finished sewing, guards walked up and down our lines to make sure that we had all followed orders correctly. Finally we were ordered to pass our needles and thread to the end of the row. "I'm going to keep mine," I decided; I was never without a needle and thread. Slowly I slid my right hand inside my left coat sleeve as if I were trying to warm my fingers and stuck the needle into the lining of the sleeve.

The guard collecting the needles took them from the last person in each row and began to count them silently. Finished, she looked up and yelled, "There's one missing!"

My heart began to race, but then I thought, "What more can they do to us?" The guard began to walk up our aisle, stopping before every woman, shouting, "Did you steal a needle?" Each woman shook her lowered head, eyes fastened on the floor. How like cattle we had become. Then I spotted a needle lying on the floor in front of me, left here by the last group of women. When

the guard approached me I pointed to the needle and she pounced on it. Satisfied, she went on to the next row.

The two guards who had marched us into the room and remained standing at the front, now moved apart. One began to speak to us in German.

"You are in Ravensbrück, an all-woman camp. There are no men here except for a few doctors in the hospital. You are our first Jewish prisoners. We have honored you by giving you the Star of David." The speaker glanced quickly at the other guard, barking a short laugh.

"Every woman is in here for a reason," she continued. "The color of the triangle on the sleeve will tell you what it is: criminals have green triangles; prostitutes, purple; those arrested for political or religious reasons, red; and Jew bitches like you, yellow. In case you're wondering why I'm here you can see by my triangle that I'm a criminal. Does anyone want to know what I did?"

No one made a sound. The realization that she was a woman and a criminal as well was more than we could absorb at one time.

"Well, I'll tell you anyway," she went on. "I killed someone . . . stabbed her with a knife! Anything else you want to know?"

Again there was silence.

"From now on," she continued, "each of you will be known by your number. Each of you will be accounted for twice a day. We know exactly how many of you there are by the numbers."

I looked down at my sleeve and again read the number: 85803.

"From here you will be taken to barracks twenty-one and given supper. Tomorrow morning you will begin work. Now, put your shoes back on. Quickly!"

She and the other guard began to move among us with long, slender

poles, hitting the women who were bent over tying their shoe laces. The shoes were damp from the long walk through the forest and would not slide onto our bare feet. We were not going to get stockings, I realized, or underpants. We were not going to get a bath or even so much as a drop of water to drink. I tied my shoes in loose knots and stood up again before a guard reached me.

A few minutes later we were driven out of the building by the guards who stood to one side, striking out randomly at the passing women with their poles. We came into a yard lit in areas by floodlights beaming down from the high walls and were marched between more long, gray buildings stretching out on both sides of us for as far as I could see--rows and rows of unpainted wood shacks with empty, black windows.

We stopped before the building marked "21" and were made to form a line outside. After a long wait in the wind each of us was ordered to remove her shoes and then allowed to enter a room immediately to the right of the large entrance hall. Here flush toilets were laid out in rows. All but one, however, were roped off. The line moved forward very slowly as each woman took her turn and then joined another line moving through the entrance room. As Esther, Lily, Ellen and I passed through the toilet line and joined the second line, the comforting smell of hot soup and the warmth and light of the spacious room gradually eased through me. At last we were out of the cold. Surely now we would be given something to drink.

As we passed by a table, each of us was handed a metal cup and spoon. Ahead of us I could see a large pot of soup and a metal plate piled with bread. To be given something to drink at last, even if it was not cold water, was almost enough to take my mind off the despair that had been growing in me since we entered the camp. Finally I reached the soup and held out my cup.

A woman prisoner, also with a green triangle on the sleeve of her uniform, dipped a ladle into the pot and held it above my bowl. Beside her stood another prisoner with a long fork, holding a plate with small pieces of meat. When a piece of meat was about to fall into my cup the prisoner with the fork picked it out of the ladle and put it on the plate of meat. My cup was filled with a few bits of turnip and clear broth.

Next another guard picked up a slice of dry, stale bread, splashed it with a spoon of pink liquid slightly resembling jam, and handed it to me. I followed the line, looking back to make sure that Lily, Esther and Ellen were still behind me. Passing out of the entrance area, we continued down the large hallway which ran the length of the building and came to two doors, one on the right and one on the left. Another guard was standing near the doors and hitting the women as they passed by, yelling, "Achtung! Achtung!"

The soup in the cups of the struck women splashed out and spilled onto the floor. This caused the guard to hit them again. Ducking away from her flailing pole, I squeezed against the far side of the door on the right and hurried through it. "If only the others follow me," I thought. I looked back to see Ellen entering the room in the same way I had done, Lily and Esther following close behind her. There was no guard in sight here. The four of us moved together and looked around the room.

"This must be where we sleep," Ellen said.

"In those?" Lily asked.

We were in a cavernous room, dim and bitterly cold. A row of rickety, wooden bunk beds three tiers high reached up above us. Each five tiers was nailed together so that a unit of fifteen beds was made. A narrow aisle ran between the units stretching as far as I could see in the pale light coming

in from the hall. Other women had already crawled onto the row of bunks nearest us. A guard at the far end of the room began to shout, "Four to a bed! Four to a bed!"

"We better hurry," I said, "if we want to sleep together."

"Let's look on the far side of the room," Ellen said, beginning to run to the area next to the windows. We followed her and came upon a unit still completely empty. Lily sank into one of the beds on the bottom bunk.

"No, no," I said. "We're going up."

"I don't want to," Lily answered. "How can we even get up there? I don't see any ladders."

"Look!" I said, grabbing one side of the beds. As I pushed against it very slightly the whole set of fifteen beds rocked back and forth. Bits of straw from the second and third tiers rained down on the bottom tier. An icy wind, blowing in through the broken windows, picked up the falling straw and whipped it into our faces.

"But it will be too hard to climb up there," Lily said.

"Just put your foot on the bottom bed and pull yourself up to the next bed. In a minute you'll be on the top."

"But I'll spill my soup."

"Then drink it first. Up! Up!"

Esther went first; Lily, second; Ellen, third; and I, last; the beds creaking and leaning precariously as we climbed. After a few minutes of turning, placing a foot so it did not stick into someone's side or removing an arm from between two legs, the four of us were lying on the bed, two on each side, propped up on elbows and eating our bread. We had gulped down the cup of soup before we climbed up, yearning for ten, twenty more cups. The bread

tasted like sawdust. A few minutes after we had finished a guard came through and told us to save the bread for the morning; it was our breakfast.

"Where are we?" Esther asked when the guard had passed by.

"I think we're in Germany--near Berlin maybe. We traveled very far north," I answered.

"Yes, but what is this place? What's happened to us?" she asked again.

"We're in a prison," I answered, "much worse than the one I was in before."

"The guards scare me," Lily said. "I've never seen women act like they do. I saw two of them kissing each other!"

"One of the German guards even killed someone!" Ellen said.

"Yes!" Lily answered. "I am so frightened . . . "

Tears began to roll down her face, falling on the soiled blue coat she had been given. "Why did they have to cut off all our hair . . . even the hair . . . " She began to cry louder, hiding her face in her hand.

We looked at each other in the half-light--at the big, naked heads, the bare necks , the large, terrified eyes. Each of us saw herself in the other and was ashamed. One by one we eased down onto the straw, the narrow, hard slats sticking out at both ends, and tried to lose ourselves in sleep. The cold found us lying exposed in the night with no blankets to cover us, no mattress under us, creeping up a leg, inside a coat sleeve, around a neck. We pressed to each other's backs and shoulders, trying not to think of the warm, soft comforters left on the train, of the beds we had once slept in beneath fresh sheets and thick blankets.

Within half an hour the slow, regular breathing of Lily told me that she was asleep; Esther and Ellen were still. A piece of straw had worked its

way inside my coat and was chafing against the back of my neck. I tried to reach up with my right hand to pull it out, but Lily was lying so tightly against me that I could not move my arm. Wiggling my shoulders inside the heavy coat, I moved the straw further down my neck where it did not irritate.

Lying still once more I thought, "I should try to sleep like the others. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?" I closed my eyes. Immediately I saw again my hair falling to the floor, the boot kicking it up onto the pile. My eyes popped open; the image disappeared. I focused on the dim shapes of the sleeping women in the bed next to us and in all the beds beyond them. Distant cries echoed in the huge room: one woman called out, "No! No!"; one sobbed in deep anguish; one moaned in a soft, mournful lowing like a cow bereft of her calf. I tried to cover my ears so I would not hear them until I remembered that I could not move my hands. Again my eyes closed; again the vision of my hair falling flashed into my head. It was this that Samuel had fallen in love with, my long, long hair that glistened in the sunlight like ripples in a field of ripening wheat. Who was I without my hair?

I remembered the time I had gone to the school contest in the fourth grade with my teacher; his wife had combed and brushed my hair endlessly, setting me on her lap as we rode along through the hills of Transylvania. "If your mind is as sharp as your hair is beautiful," she told me then, "you'll be sure to win the contest."

"It is!" I had answered, causing my teacher to burst out laughing.

Suddenly I felt a sharp stinging on my legs. I was being bitten. There it was again! Whatever it was must have also been attacking Lily for she flung her arm across me and then drew it back to scratch at her leg. The painting of the louse at the entrance to the camp flashed into my mind.

Shuddering with revulsion, I worked my arm loose and tore at the itching with my fingernails until my legs bled. Finally I sank back down on the straw.

"So this is how it all ends," I thought, " . . . my struggle to leave home, to become independent, to make as much as possible of my life. It ends in my lying here amid an entire barracks of women--homeless, having nothing, not even my hair, freezing, filthy, attacked by lice. It would be better to be dead."

Sharp cries awoke me. "Don't hit me! Oh, please," a woman in the next aisle was screaming.

"Get up, you Jew bitches!" a guard shouted in Polish. "Get up, pigs!" With each command her heavy, long stick came down on a bed of women with a whack. While I was still trying to struggle up from sleep, the guard was below us and striking at the women on the lower bunk. I shook Lily and then the other two. Quickly we slipped our tied-together shoes around our necks, grabbed our cups and spoons and began to climb down the three tiers. The other women who were being herded toward the door pressed against us as soon as we reached the floor. I grabbed Lily's and Ellen's hands, Ellen grabbed Esther's and the four of us joined the women rapidly surging out of the door, through the hallway past the entrance room and outside into the ice-cold air. The sky was dark, the faintest traces of light only beginning to appear on the horizon.

"Zielappel! Zielappel! Schnell! Zielappel!" a guard began to shout. The first of hundreds of hours spent in counting us had begun. We were grouped into lines five across while the four guards who were in charge of our barracks counted us. I stood in the dark, wondering how they could see to count, an arm's length from Lily on my left and Ellen on my right, Esther next to her.

The air was clear, the stars above us sparkling dots of light in the blackness. A numbness began to creep through my fingers and I flexed and unflexed my hands inside the deep coat pockets. My feet suffered more; we were forbidden to move and could do no more than wiggle our toes back and forth inside our damp shoes. How I longed for my warm, woolen stockings and Samuel's slacks.

An hour must have passed as we stood there, silent, still, freezing cell by cell. One of the two German guards continued to count us. The other had already moved up and down our rows twice but had evidentally come up with a different number each time. The enumerating continued through another hour, the sky turned a pale gray, then white, the cold entrenched itself firmly into our bodies and still they were not finished with us.

Across from us was the barracks where we had slept. As I was wondering how many hours more we would have to endure this, wondering how long we would be able to go on without slipping off to death like so many women before us, two guards came out of the door carrying something. I could not tell at first what it was as their backs were turned to us. Then an arm fell, swayed back and forth as they walked. The body of a woman was thrown against the side of the barracks, hitting the rotting boards with a dull thud. The arm I had glimpsed stretched out to one side in an arc. As the guards walked back into the barracks one kicked at the arm, moving it towards the body. It eased out again, stretching towards us, palm up, fingers frozen into a cup.

The guards returned with another body, throwing it down beside the first, and then another. As I watched, body after body was carried out, flung down, stacked into a pile in a pattern of horizontal lines repeated sixteen bodies high, five bodies long. I became almost hypnotized by the stacking of body upon body, the absence of any curves or angles, the endless piling up of

long, faceless lines having only a slight resemblance to anything alive, anything human. Then, with a sudden shock, I thought, "They're women! Last night they went to sleep in the same building as I. This morning they're dead."

The image of that pile of bodies frozen in the cold, gray light never left me. I would not be in that pile, I decided then. I would not die. Somehow, in whatever way I could, I would remain alive, Esther, Ellen and Lily as well. As long as I had strength we would live. I would see to it.

CHAPTER TWENTY

How do I begin to tell how it was that Esther, Ellen, Lily and I survived Ravensbrück concentration camp while all around us death prowled like a pack of starving dogs, devouring nineteen out of every twenty women? Some of them were too young, some too old; some were frail, some ill; some were simply without hope. Ellen and Lily were also quite young--Ellen, sixteen and Lily, eighteen. Esther was not much older, turning nineteen that December, 1945. I was twenty-six. I felt completely responsible for these three young girls; to me we were all sisters. I had to do everything in my power to enable us to remain alive. Survival became a matter of establishing rules and adhering to them religiously. I was the oldest; I made the rules. We were of the old European school of thought: you listened to the oldest even if she was a fool.

The first rule was: do not drink the water. That the water was contaminated became apparent the first day we were in the camp. After the guards were finally through counting us that morning, four hours after we had begun standing outside in the cold, we were lined up for our work assignments without being given anything to eat or drink. The four of us and many other women from our barracks were put in the work detail that unloaded ships at a harbor located about three miles from the camp. Once crates of vegetables were carried off the ship, we unpacked and sorted them in a large storage cellar, the kartoffenkeller. There were bins for each type of vegetable: turnip, radish, carrot, cabbage and potato.

Ravensbrück was a large camp, imprisoning eighty-five thousand women,

the majority of them Gentiles who had been arrested for political reasons. There were many nuns, prostitutes, Gypsies and women who may have harbored Jewish people or been associated with a group regarded as detrimental to the Nazi cause. We only heard about these other women, however, as we Jews were kept separate from the other prisoners at all times. We went out in the morning to the harbor and returned again at night without seeing anyone except our guards. The other prisoners remained within the walls of the camp, working in factories.

That first morning as our work detail walked the three miles on numb feet, guards on both sides of us holding the leashes of German shepherds straining to be free, the four of us joined hands as before, fingers interlaced tightly, soup cups swinging from strings in our button holes. On reaching the ship we climbed a ramp leading up to the deck and immediately were ordered to carry crates of vegetables back down the ramp and up a small hill to the kartoffenkeller. Finally at noon a pot of soup was brought to the door of the cellar. We lined up, held out our metal cups to receive the thin broth and went inside the cellar to sit down and eat. At the end of the meal we were, of course, still thirsty as well as hungry. Several of the women noticed a faucet near the door on the outside of the cellar and drank from it. During the afternoon many other women also drank from the faucet, snatching a few gulps of water whenever they could.

Late in the day, as Lily and I were standing above the bins, she said, "I'm going to get a drink outside. I'll be right back."

"No, you're not!" I ordered. "I don't want any of us to drink the water."

"But I'm so thirtsy," she said, looking at me through her thick

glasses, eyebrows drawn together. "Why can't I have water?"

"I don't trust it. Remember that time in the labor camp when the water was bad one day? A lot of the women got diarrhea after drinking it."

"How do you know that this water is bad? Maybe it isn't."

"But maybe it is. We'll wait and see. If no one comes down with diarrhea after a few days we'll drink it. I'm going over to tell Esther and Ellen the same thing. Do me a favor: stay right here."

She sighed, "All right."

We worked in pairs, each woman holding a handle at either end of a wooden crate as we walked down the ramp and up the hill. Lily and I often composed one pair while Ellen and Esther made up the other. Every day, seven days of the week, we unloaded and sorted until late in the afternoon and were then marched back to the camp, marched through a back gate, marched past the long rows of barracks, finally coming to a halt in the counting area directly across from our building. There we stood in lines to be counted again for several hours while the sky grew dark, the wind even more harsh. We were forbidden to leave our lines for any reason. As we waited a guard moved back and forth, counting us one by one with an outstretched finger.

There were four SS guards who were responsible for our barracks: the two German guards who had supervised the cutting of our hair and distribution of our clothes and two Polish women, political prisoners who wore red triangles on their sleeves. Each woman spoke to us in her native tongue. If you understood neither German nor Polish your life was filled with terror as you tried to guess what you were being ordered to do before a club came down on your head for not obeying the order fast enough. Esther and I understood German, having learned it in school as children, and Ellen understood Polish. Most of the other women, including Lily, were from Budapest and spoke only Hungarian.

On that first night in line to be counted, several women in front of me began to shift slightly, bending over at the waist, standing first on one foot and then the other. One moved over a pace, provoking a guard to shout, "Achtung!" The woman stood still briefly but then doubled over as if in great pain. "Achtung! Achtung!" the guard shouted again and in an instant was at the woman's side, beating her on the back with a heavy stick. After a series of hard, heavy blows the guard strutted back to the front of the group, glared at us and stamped to the front row to begin counting all over again.

A minute later I heard the sound of someone defecating, smelled the sickly-sweet odor. Then the woman in front of me who had been struck by the guard removed something from under her coat and set it beside her on the ground. It was her soup cup overflowing with watery feces. Within the next hour many of the other women did the same, all victims of the bad water.

When we were dismissed from counting we formed a long toilet line outside the barracks door and stood several more hours while the line moved slowly forward into the building. When I reached the door I saw a set of guards waiting. As I entered the hall one yelled for me to raise my arms high into the air, the other rapidly moving her hands down the sides of my coat, checking the pockets carefully, finally turning them inside out. "Beeilen Sie sich!" she ordered and I moved forward, wondering why I had been searched.

Esther, Ellen and Lily were behind me and I tried to see if they, too, were stopped. The procedure was the same: each was ordered to halt and raise her arms. They all passed the inspection. I was breathing a sigh of relief and turning again to face the front of the toilet line when I heard someone behind me yell, "Diebe! Diebe!" (thief). Quickly I turned again to look.

One of the guards at the door was holding a radish. The prisoner beside her stood with eyes squeezed shut, all color drained from her face. The second guard began to hit the accused woman on the head with a piece of metal. When the woman tried to cover her head with her arms the guard yanked the arms away and hit her again, over and over, until blood was pouring from the woman's forehead and down into her eyes. Abruptly the guard put down her metal pole and shoved the woman forward with her foot.

By now I realized that the other toilets had also been installed for our use. The guards had simply closed them to us so that each of them could have an individual toilet roped off in a separate area. As I waited in line, a guard walked to her area, slipped under the rope, urinated, made use of one of the many rolls of toilet paper stacked beside her toilet, and went across the hall to a room containing sinks and showers also roped off into separate areas. There were no doors to either of these rooms; everything was visible. Thus the other five hundred women in our barracks and I had only one toilet, no toilet paper and no way to wash our hands and bathe our bodies.

As the line approached the toilet I saw the woman who had stood in front of me in the zielappel reach the stool and pour into it the contents of her cup. A few minutes later she would hold out the same cup, having no way to rinse it out before it was filled with soup. Beginning in the pit of my stomach and rapidly streaking up through my chest and throat, a wave of nausea swept over me. Quelling the revulsion quickly, I was left with simply pity. I knew the backgrounds of these women in line with me; they were predominantely from refined homes in Budapest, from intellectual homes where one discussed current politics while dining from delicate china in candlelight.

I made the second rule: each of us must use the toilets either at the kartoffenkeller or at the ship late in the afternoon every day. This practice would save us the misery of having to wait an additional two hours outside to use the barracks toilet after already standing in the counting line for two or three hours. We would then be able to obtain our supper and go to bed that much earlier.

That evening we went back to the same unit of beds that we had slept in the night before. "Up we go!" I said.

Again Lily asked, "Can't we sleep on the bottom bunk? I'm so tired I can barely move."

Ellen looked at her, mouth open, jaw dropped. "Didn't you see all those poor, dead women this morning?" she asked. "They had all slept on the bottom level next to the open windows. They froze to death. Sereń is right! We're going up!"

I smiled to myself; they were learning.

When we were settled on our bed I took off my coat and began to tear a foot-wide section away from the bottom. The coat was old, fairly worn and tore easily.

"What are you doing?" Esther asked.

"What does it look like?" I answered.

"You're destroying your coat! It's the only one you have."

"I'm just shortening it," I said. "All day long I tramped around on the hem. With the material I tear off I'm going to make myself a hat!"

As I pulled off the strip, part of the hem came undone and a pile of Hungarian paper money fell into my lap. "Look!" I said. "We're rich!"

Unraveling the entire hem, I found almost a hundred bills; the woman who had the coat before me must have hidden her money there while enroute to Ravensbrück.

"What will you do with it?" Ellen asked. "If the guards see the money they'll take it away."

"You could take us all out to a nice restaurant," Lily said.

"That's a wonderful idea!" Ellen answered.

"I've thought of the perfect way to use this money," I said.

"What is it?" they all asked.

"Toilet paper!"

"Are you serious?" Ellen asked.

"Why not? There isn't the slightest chance that we'll get to spend the money. And wouldn't you like to have something to use when you go to the toilet?"

"I would!" Lily said. "I've hated having nothing all this time."

"Here's one for you, one for you, one for you and one for me," I said, giving each of us a bill. "I'll hide the rest of the money under the straw. It should last us for a while."

That night, after I had sewn up the new hem of my coat and made myself a snug, warm hat, I lay down beside Lily who was seemingly asleep. After a few minutes, however,she began to giggle.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"Mother always said that she would like money to burn. I was just wondering what she would think about having money to wipe yourself with."

"Lily, Lily," I said, patting her head as if she were a small child. "Go to sleep."

She turned over, fell fast asleep. A voice began to sing very softly. I recognized it immediately as the voice of the singer from the Budapest opera who had been on the train with us. Now she sang a Hungarian song, a slow, peaceful lullaby that eased out over the bunk beds, the rows and rows, tiers upon tiers, of women huddled in the darkness. We were all children again being lulled to sleep by a calm voice singing of a pale moon, of stars up in the sky, of a good, sweet night.

The money lasted for three weeks. By then it was the end of October and the cold had come to rival starvation as our most deadly enemy. In the mornings when we rose I glanced at the bottom bunks as we hurried out to be counted. They were filled with women lying rigid, a layer of snow drifting over their coats, over their bare heads, over their eyes open and still. Several times I warned those on the bottom bunks not to sleep there, not to expose themselves to the open windows, but the women always answered, "Where will we go? All the beds are full." And they were. As soon as a woman died, her empty bed was filled with another Jewish woman transferred to Ravensbrück from a different camp. After a while I saw how hopeless the situation was for almost all of us, how we could die of despair if each death was fully acknowledged. I came to know the other sixteen women in the four top bunks beside ours; we occupied the first bed in the row and they had to crawl over it to get to theirs. The rest of the women, however, remained strangers. If I had also made friends with them I would have been taking the risk of coming to care for them, of missing them when they were taken away, of grieving for them when they died.

Even the women who crawled over our bed I came to know by their faces

only. They handed their shoes up to us first and we carefully took them, not understanding how some of the other women in the top beds could bicker about giving this simple help. When we held out a hand to pull them up several of the women broke into a smile and murmured, "Thank you." Sometimes one added, "My name is Helena," or "I'm Ruth."

The one woman whom I became friends with was the one who slept in the bed next to ours. She was slightly older than most of us, in her early thirties, and had graduated from a medical school in Vienna. Before she was taken into the labor force with us as another digger of ditches she had been a surgeon in a prestigious hospital in Budapest.

She told me these things one evening as we sat on our beds talking for a few minutes before lying down to sleep.

"It's such a waste!" I said to her. "Your life is being completely wasted working in a potato cellar when you could be saving lives."

"Yes," she answered, "that grates on me almost more than anything. But aren't all of us being wasted? Aren't we all of value? I am just grateful that they did not put me to work in the hospital here."

"Why?" I asked.

"Have you ever seen any woman come back? I have yet to see a woman who has reported sick and been sent to the hospital be returned to the barracks. Everyone disappears."

"What do you think happens to them?" I asked.

"They very likely become subjects for experimentation," she answered.

"Do you think so?"

"I am almost positive. The Nazis have become interested in doing research on the affects of different substances on the human body. I wouldn't go near that hospital!"

About a week after this conversation another woman from our group of twenty on the top layer of beds motioned me to her side as we worked in the food cellar.

"Tonight I'm reporting sick," she whispered to me. "I'm going into the hospital. I wanted you to know."

"No, you can't do that!" I told her. "No one in her right mind reports sick."

"But my feet are becoming so swollen with frostbite that I can barely walk. My sister, Alda, also has frozen feet, but she is afraid of the hospital."

"She's right. You must not do this!"

"I can't stand it any longer. I have to!"

That night she entered the hospital. She never came back. One day her sister was gone as well.

It thus became increasingly apparent that there was no middle ground in Ravensbrück. You were given two choices: life or death. If you did not get out of bed at four o'clock in the morning when a guard came through yelling, "Get up, lazy Jew pigs!", flailing as she shouted, if you lingered in a half-conscious state because throughout the night your mind had been tormented by thoughts of food while your body had been ravaged by hordes of lice, if your whole system was so exhausted from bouts of diarrhea or vomiting that you could not will yourself to rise up and join the lines for counting, you had chosen death whether you realized it or not.

While the rest of us stood in the zielappel lines from four o'clock until seven or eight, endlessly being counted, those women who had consciously or not chosen death were carried out and stacked beside the barracks door in the same manner as the first day--like piles of firewood. The Gentile barracks

also had dead women beside their doors in the morning but they lost only the very old or the very sick, not more than four or five each morning on one pile. At our barracks the number of women grew almost daily, reaching up higher and higher, ten, eleven, twelve feet into the ashen sky.

On a number of mornings we were still in line when a large, open truck came to take the pile of bodies to the crematorium burning somewhere in the camp. As the SS guards picked up the bodies and threw them into the truck one by one, a woman being carried would sometimes cry out, or the hand of a woman in the pile would rise, her fingers feeling the air, and then fall back. Some were still alive! The SS, however, did not recognize illness. If you got up and went to work you were alive. If you did not get up, you were dead.

Every day each of us had to make this choice between life or death over again. Every day the decision became a little more difficult to make. As our bodies grew thinner and thinner, as our numbers continued to decrease, it became ever more tempting to give into hopelessness. It was sometimes such a small thing that made you feel utterly helpless. When I came in from working each day, sometimes in freezing rain or thick snow, so hungry that I had thought of nothing all afternoon but the cup of broth and crust of bread I would be given for supper, I wanted to scream when a guard carefully picked out the pieces of meat from my soup. She would dine on nothing but meat while I had to be satisfied with a thin broth and a dribble of half-cooked turnips. A complaint would have only resulted in a series of blows on my head. There was nothing left to do but devise my own method of maintaining at least a minimum of control over my life and over the lives of the three young girls for whom I was responsible. Thus the rules were established and obeyed without fail. They were the only things that saved us.

To the rules concerning water, toilets and beds I added one more. The meals we were given each day never varied: a cup of broth twice a day with the addition of a potato or turnip at noon, if we were lucky, and a piece of hard, tasteless bread with watery jam on top at night to be saved for the morning. One night I was not as hungry as usual, having helped myself to carrots and radishes all afternoon while working in the kartoffenkeller. We all did this; the guards could not watch us every minute and it was necessary to eat whenever we could if we were to survive. I decided that night to save my piece of bread for the morning, hiding it between my shoes which I used for a pillow. The next morning while my eyes were still closed I thought of the bread, glad that for once I would not have to go to work without anything to eat. Sliding my fingers into the space between the shoes, I found nothing. Someone had stolen my bread.

I knew that Lily, Esther or Ellen would never take anything from me as we always shared everything. The thief had to be someone from the next bed, someone for whom I had held shoes while she crawled over our bed or whispered to in the still hours of the night. I realized that when people are desperately hungry they will do things they would never do otherwise, that they will steal even though their hearts are burning with shame. However, that was the last time anyone stole anything from us. The fourth rule was established: never save food. The corollary to it was: never pass up the chance to obtain food--as much as possible.

To this end we always tried to work in the detail that unloaded the ships and sorted the vegetables. There were other work details that did such things as shovel sand all day and were nowhere near food. During the first few days of camp one of the German SS supervisors learned that I understood

German. She had asked for an interpreter one day and I volunteered. Normally I volunteered for nothing unless it involved food, as our best chance for survival was to stay as inconspicuous as possible; anyone gaining the attention of a guard was usually singled out for punishment. However, I could not bear the beating of the Hungarian girls simply because they could not understand the orders. I especially worried about Lily as she was timid behind her glasses and would not ask for anything. I translated for her and the other Hungarians.

This supervisor was not much taller than I, quick, with brown eyes dark and glinting, and often walked by me as we marched back and forth to work. She seemed to enjoy having someone to converse with in German as well as translate for her. We had polite conversations about the weather--the amount of rain that had fallen the day before, the thickness of the snowfall, the direction of the wind. I did not mind these conversations, for if a Polish guard ordered our line to come with her that day to carry sand this German guard barked, "No, this line is in my detail!" As a whole line of five women was never broken up, Esther, Ellen, Lily and whoever else was in our line went off with me to the kartoffenkeller. Once there we popped a radish or a carrot into our mouths at every opportunity.

One day I thought, "Why should we only be able to eat while at work? Why not bring some vegetables back to the barrack? Maybe we can even trade them for bread." I had come to realize within a few weeks after our arrival at Ravensbrück that we Jews were given different food than the other prisoners. In the mornings the guards had occasionally begun to offer us what they called coffee but was actually a lukewarm, gray liquid with a rancid taste. The four of us used it to wash our faces. Whenever a guard asked for a volunteer to

obtain the coffee at the kitchen building that served the whole camp I volunteered, always on the lookout for food. Often I was chosen to go.

The first time I came into the kitchen and saw the huge, boiling pots filled with pounds and pounds of thick meat and whole potatoes, I knew that it was only we who were being starved. The kitchen was filled with food, the aroma of real, freshly-baked bread so strong that I nearly grew faint from the smell. I wanted a slice of that bread so badly; the piece of stale, caked bread that we received each night was nothing more than flour mixed with sawdust and drugs to keep us from menstruating. If somehow I managed to sneak radishes or carrots back into our barracks, perhaps I could trade them with someone who received real bread.

One day as we worked I broke several radishes in two and hid them in the shoulder pads of my coat, one on each side. Next I slid two carrots into the hem of my coat, also one on each side for balance. For each vegetable I hid, I ate two. I did all this without attracting the attention of a guard. Esther, however, saw me hide the carrots in the hem.

"What are you doing?" she whispered, her eyes wide. "You'll be caught. Don't do it. Please!"

"I won't be caught," I whispered back. "Don't talk to me about it! Just pretend you don't know anything."

That night after we were released from the zielappel lines and were entering the barrack one by one to be searched, I sent Esther in first and then Ellen and Lily. As my turn came my heartbeat quickened but I knew that the guards were mainly interested in the pockets. I was stopped and the guard hurriedly passed her hands down my sides and emptied out my coat pockets. Then she paused. I could already feel the metal pole coming down on my head,

remembering suddenly the beatings in the prison with my father. Then, without a word, the guard ordered me to move on.

Later in our bed I brought out the vegetables. Once we were all in bed the guards did not leave their heated, lit dining room for our cold, dark cave.

"Look what I have for us," I said, fishing a radish out of the padding.

"Did you hide it there?" Lily asked.

"It didn't grow there," I laughed.

"I know that," she said, hurt. "I just didn't think you would dare to steal it."

"It wasn't that hard. I'm hoping to trade it for bread. I'm fairly sure that the Gentile women from Poland two barracks over from us get good bread. Oh, I would love to have some!"

"I'll go over there," Ellen said. "I speak Polish."

"You aren't afraid?" I asked.

"Yes, but I'll go anyway. You stole the vegetables. I'll trade them."

She took the vegetables, hid them in her coat, climbed down to the floor and jumped out of a broken window. Minute after minute crept by while she did not return. After at least half an hour had passed and she was not back I thought, "I should never have let her go. She's still a child. I should have gone instead."

Then I heard her climbing back in the window. In another minute she was back up in our bed. "I got some bread!" she whispered. "The Polish women were glad to trade it for some fresh vegetables."

"Ellen!" I said. "I can't believe it. Real bread. Just smell it!"

We handed the large chunk of dark bread from one to the other, inhaling the intermingling odors of yeast, oil and flour, stroking the thick, moist texture with the tips of our fingers. Finally it came back to Ellen. She broke it into four pieces, dividing it as evenly as possible, and we slowly ate, savoring each bite. When we were finished we lay down to sleep, almost content. I closed my eyes, planning how many radishes and carrots I would steal tomorrow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

By December we numbered less than a thousand out of the ten thousand who had walked out of Budapest. For the most part we were alive only in the sense that we breathed, spoke, willed our bodies to continue to work. We had the appearance of those for whom, as my mother would have said, "their souls have come to say good night." Each woman dragged herself along, left foot slowly pushed forward, right pulled up to meet it, neither foot ever leaving the ground. Each shriveled body hunched over into itself, head bare, hairless, coat tied with a length of twine to keep the raw wind from howling up one's legs and chest almost naked beneath the thin undershirt and dress, metal cup and spoon dangling from a string through a buttonhole, clinking with each shuffle forward.

When it rained we sloshed through the mud, through the middle of puddles in the road on our way to the harbor each morning, trudged back again at night. For days on end the sky poured down upon us. We stayed in the food cellar as much as possible, the sounds of heavy drops flung against the roof constantly drumming in our ears. At night as we lay on the third tier beneath our water-logged coats, the smell of wet wool, the clammy dampness, permeated our sleep, mingled with the yearnings for a slice of meat, a whole loaf of bread. The sheets of rain seemed almost upon us, coming relentlessly over our heads. If we had dreamed it would have been of water washing over us in waves, carrying us out to sea. But we did not dream, ever. If we had held again in our dreams our mothers' arms, our fathers' hands, we would not have been able

to let go again in the morning. It was better to fall into a deep, exhausted sleep, a dreamless sleep, where one was not tempted to slip off to memories and never return.

The rain was particularly harsh on our feet as our leather shoes shrank from the dampness. When the weather turned cold again our feet became frost-bitten and swelled inside the tight shoes, making it almost impossible to walk. Shoes began to disappear during the night as each woman tried to find a pair that would allow her to walk without pain. The four of us slept on our shoes to prevent them from being stolen. Those women who woke up without shoes went to work barefoot until a guard decided to give them another pair from the camp storehouse.

By mid-December my feet were so swollen inside my shoes that every morning in zielappel I clenched my fists until my feet froze to keep from crying out in pain. Once they were frozen they lost all sensation; I walked around all day on two blocks of wood. In the evening the whole process began again. When my toes turned dark I knew that I had to get different shoes, but they were given out only if you had none and then if and when a guard chose to give you a pair.

Then sleep was taken from us. In the middle of the night the guards came into our barracks shouting, "Get up, pigs! Up, you lazy, filthy swine!" They whacked us into consciousness, hurried us out into the sleet, into the piercing cold, into the snow, to unload trains that came to Ravensbrück day and night carrying car after car of plunder. Forced to unload these trains while the Gentile prisoners slept undisturbed, we walked by their barracks, glancing through unbroken windows at the softly-lit rooms, at the layers of blankets on each bed, ever on the outside looking in.

Once we arrived at the trains we climbed up into the cars and began to unload them, making piles for each kind of goods. Paintings went in one pile; white down comforters covered with satin, embroidered in silk, went in another; linens in a third. Women's lingerie in pale yellows, light blues, was heaped beside the delicate dresses of little girls, pink and green ribbons twined into the bodices. Doll carriages trimmed with shiny chrome made up still another pile and to the side of them, dolls tossed every which way, soft faces thrown against the ground, legs sticking out in all directions. The trains came endlessly. Night after night we unloaded boxes and boxes, cars and more cars, coming from all parts of Europe, especially from the Scandinavian countries. Sometimes I found a name and an address sewn inside the lining of a coat and wondered about the man or woman who had owned the coat, about the Jewish home and family that had been destroyed. After a minute, however, I threw the coat down into the proper pile and went on with the unloading, hoping that if we worked fast enough we would be able to return to our barracks before morning.

One night while I was unloading a train I came across a pair of wooden clogs like the ones worn by the Gentile prisoners. Immediately I took off my old, shriveled shoes, threw them into the pile of shoes on the ground and put on the clogs. They were not very warm as the top was made of canvas, but they fit my feet comfortably; I could wiggle my toes for the first time in months.

The next morning when we lined up for counting, two hours after we had returned to the barracks, I stood again with clenched fists until my feet froze, anticipating how much easier it would be to walk to the harbor in my new shoes. Then, as one of the German supervisors was counting us, she stopped suddenly and stared at my feet. I panicked. This was the same supervisor who

walked beside me back and forth to work, engaging in conversations, but that did not mean she was my friend. First and foremost she was an SS officer; first and foremost I was a Jew bitch.

"Take off those shoes!" she ordered, her brown eyes flashing.

I removed them as quickly as I could.

"Get your own shoes, thief!" she yelled.

The blood pounded in my head. How could I get my shoes? The were at the bottom of a pile by the trains. Then, for no apparent reason, the other German SS supervisor walked over to the first one and said, "Oh, let her have the shoes. She was about due for a new pair anyway."

The first SS woman stared at me for another minute, hands on her hips, mouth drawn into a thin, tight line, and then turned abruptly and strutted to the head of the row. She did not walk beside me that day, either coming or going, but the next day she was back, remarking on the delicate texture of the snow that had fallen during the night.

These two SS supervisors, as well as the Polish SS women, were infinitely interesting to us; our lives sometimes depended on determining exactly what pleased them and precisely what angered them. However, knowing these things helped us only in the slightest, for the majority of the time the motivation for their actions was incomprehensible. You could expect a beating if you were caught stealing vegetables or if you did not understand an order, but you could also be hit for no reason.

The short, quick-tempered SS supervisor who walked beside me must have heard the woman from the Budapest Opera sing to us one night as we drifted off to sleep. One day during lunch in the kartoffenkeller she walked briskly over to the opera singer and commanded, "Sing for me! Here!" and pointed to a

box in the middle of the floor. Startled, the woman walked to the center of the room and sat down on the box. Very softly she began to sing a popular song in German, "Du, du, du bist mein herzen . . . "

As she sang the damp, chilly air, the murmur of the rain upon the roof, the hollow faces of the women staring at her with empty eyes, seemed to slip away from her and she began to sing louder, her voice filling the underground room. The song she sang was in waltz time, the slow, sweet beat moving like a strong tide through us, up . . . down . . . down, up . . . down . . . down, washing each of us upon a calm, sun-dappled shore, back into the flux, up on the shore once more.

The song over, she stopped. We slid into the sea. Deep silence hung in the air for long minutes while tears ran down the face of the SS woman. In another instant, before any of us knew what was happening, the SS woman was beating the singer, hitting her again and again with the ladle she had grabbed from the pot, striking her on the head, on the arms, on the back. Just as abruptly she stopped, put the ladle back, stood up and ordered us to begin working. The singer struggled up from the floor and stumbled to a sorting bin.

Three days later this command performance was repeated and continued thereafter several times a week. The scenario never varied: we sat down to eat, the woman was ordered to sing, the SS woman's face became bathed with tears, the singer was beaten.

One day sometime in December the SS supervisor inflicted a particularly brutal beating to the singer, striking her repeatedly with the heavy club she was carrying that day. I wanted to rush at her, grab the club and hit her over the head, but I knew I would only be arrested and thrown into solitary confinement where I could not take care of Esther, Ellen and Lily. Finally

the beating stopped and the supervisor ordered the singer to get back to work. The singer did not move.

"Get up, I said!" the SS woman commanded. "You Godforsaken sow! Get back to work!" She kicked her in the side but still the singer did not move. She was lying on the floor, face down, arms curled around the patches of hair on her head beginning to grow out again. The SS supervisor was by now scarlet with rage, clenching the club with both arms, ready to begin the beating once more. However, the listlessness of the body on the floor, the way the legs sprawled out far apart from each other, must have aroused her curiosity; she put the club down and stooped beside the singer, turning her over. A line of blood ran from the woman's open mouth, dribbled down her chin onto the floor. Already her eyes were sinking into their sockets.

"Damn bitch!" the SS woman shouted. Rising quickly, she stalked out of the room, not looking back. We filed out of the room into the pouring rain, the water rushing over us from all sides.

That night we sat on our bed talking for a while longer than usual. We were continuing to trade vegetables for bread as often as we could. Sometimes Ellen came back with one or two slices, sometimes with none. I did not allow Esther or Lily to hide the carrots and radishes in their coats and told Ellen, "Don't bother. I'll steal enough for all of us." I do not think that any of the other women in our barracks brought back vegetables. The fear of being caught and punished was overwhelming. On this particular evening we sat very quiet after having shared our extra bread.

"She had such a lovely voice . . . " Lily said finally.

"She did," Ellen replied. "I will miss it so."

"What if that SS supervisor finds someone new to pick on?" Lily asked. "She terrifies me more and more. What if she decides to pick on me?"

"Lily, Lily," I said, reaching out to hold her hand. "She won't hurt you. She picked on the singer because--I don't know why. Because she was beautiful, I guess. She made her cry."

"I know, but I'm so scared!" Lily answered, her fingers tightening around mine.

"Do you know what?" I asked her. "I've thought of another place to hide carrots!"

"You have?" she answered. "Where?"

"In my shoes! These boats I wear are so big that I could slide a carrot along the side of my foot. That's two more carrots to trade."

"But what will they smell like after they're in your shoes?" Esther asked. "The Polish girls won't eat them."

"They'll eat them! So they'll smell like dirty feet. We eat bread that has lice crawling all over it when the guard takes it out from under the rag cover, don't we? They'll eat smelly carrots."

I was right. The carrots I sneaked into camp in my shoes were also traded for bread, when the Polish women had extra, and gave us the strength to keep getting up in the morning for zielappel. Our feet continued to swell and freeze, swell and defrost, but we were dragging along from day to day as well as possible.

Then one afternoon while we were unloading a ship the SS woman who often walked beside me ordered me to report to the other end of the deck. When I arrived I found a guard stamping furiously back and forth on the planks. She had commanded several of the Hungarian girls to separate three different kinds of crates and put them into piles. As the orders had been given to them in German, they did not know what they were to do. I translated for them and hurried back to Lily whom I had been forced to leave by herself.

When I returned to the area where she and I had been pushing crates across the deck, I could not find her. "Have you seen Lily?" I asked Esther and Ellen.

"No, we were at the cellar," Esther answered. "We just returned."

"We've got to find her!" I said.

After searching as much as we could while looking like we were still working, I finally spotted her slumped behind a large crate, her face in her hands.

"Lily?" I asked. "Are you all right?"

She looked up at me, cheeks pallid, blue-white patches encircling each eye. A bruise on her temple was turning dark, the center already green.

"Your glasses are gone! Oh, Lily, did someone hit you?"

She kept looking at me, but no sound came from her. She seemed to be in shock. Then a woman from our top level of bunks came up to us and said, "One of the SS women, the short, Polish one, beat her. She gave her an order in Polish and Lily didn't obey it."

"She doesn't know Polish. Come, Lily," I said, putting my arms under hers. Ellen went to her side and the two of us raised her up. She stood quietly, still not speaking.

"I can't see . . . " she said finally in a low whine.

"Do you know who I am, Lily?" I asked.

"You're Seren. I know your voice. But I can't see your face."

"What can you see? Can you see anything?"

"I can make out a few shapes--some colors. That's all. What am I going to do? I've never been without my glasses." She began to weep, hiding her face in her hands again.

"It's all right," I said, pulling down her hands and taking them in mine. "I'll stay with you. I'll see for you."

After that at least one of us was always by her side. When we walked back and forth to work I took one arm, Esther or Ellen took the other and we half-carried Lily along. If the SS woman marched beside me I was terrified that she would notice Lily stumbling along, nearly tripping every few steps. Ellen and I considered trying to hide Lily somewhere in the barracks during the day, perhaps under a pile of straw in our bed, but we could not count on being taken back to the same barracks again at night. We also thought that the barracks might be inspected during the day and Lily would be discovered and taken to the crematorium, so we decided to keep her with us at all times. If she slipped and fell against me while I was listening to the SS woman talk about the weather, I did not turn towards Lily, continuing to listen attentively.

"Isn't this a fine day?" the SS woman would often ask.

"Yes, indeed!" I always replied, taking no notice of Lily nearly knocking me to the frozen ground.

Once we were at work it was easier to take care of Lily. If we were unloading a ship, I put her at the back end of a crate and I went in the front as we carried it off the deck, down the ramp and to the cellar; she simply followed the crate. If we worked in the cellar one of us stood beside her, putting a crate of vegetables at our feet. The location of each bin she could distinguish by color: a red haze was radishes; orange, carrots; green, cabbage.

Often while we worked together I told stories, partially to keep Lily's mind off her lack of glasses, partially just to hear the sound of my own voice. I have always loved to talk. Since Lily and many of the other women in the

camp were children of mixed marriages where Jewish customs had ceased to be observed generations ago, I loved to tell her how it was in my home. I explained how my family observed each holiday, how the cycle of the year, the quickening of spring, the dying of summer, the advent of fall, moved us from season to season, from year to year, like the violets coming up each April on the mountain tops or the leaves of corn whispering in the summer suns.

"Tell me again about the polenta," Lily said one day. Like all of us, she could think of nothing but food.

"My father normally never touched anything in the kitchen," I began.

"Now he's dead," a recess of my mind reminded me. "No, I would not think about that. Go on with the story!"

"Preparing food was women's work!" I continued. But for some reason or other he decided that he and he only could cook polenta. In the summer we often had dairy for the evening meal and this is when my father made the polenta. He had a special kettle that could only be used for cooking the corn down into mush. Once it was cooked he took it--Oh, it was as smooth as silk--and layered it in a large pan. On the bottom he melted butter and cheese, then he put a layer of polenta, a layer of cheese, more polenta, and so on, making three or four layers. On the top he put a big mound of sour cream and spread it all around. After it baked for about an hour he took it out of the oven. The cheese and butter and polenta had all melted together and smelled so delicious that we could barely wait until my father was through saying the prayers. Finally he cut it into thick slices and we poured cream over it that our mother had skimmed from the milk. It was like tasting a piece of heaven when I took that first bite! With it we had tall glasses of milk cooled in a barrel in the spring and . . . "

"Stop! Stop!" a woman next to us cried, interrupting me. "I can't bear to hear about all that food!"

We turned to our bins, sorting in silence. After a long while Lily said, "The time goes too slowly when you don't talk, Sereń. Tell me about something else. Tell me about Shabat."

"Shabat!" I answered. "How I loved Shabat! On Friday mornings I woke up to the smells of baking rolls and challah. The odors came into my bedroom early in the morning, when I was still asleep beside Esther and Zipporah, and entered my dreams. I used to imagine that I was in a room piled to the ceiling with bread--loaves and loaves of sesame bread, poppy seed bread, braided bread warm from the oven, the butter melting into the crusts."

"You're talking about food again!" the same woman interrupted.

"Oh, I forgot . . . Well, I can tell you about the ceremonies. It was very important that everything and everyone be absolutely clean for Shabat. All of us--my mother and father, Herman and Tamara, Rose, Berta, Mendel, Meyer, Louise, Shlomo, Eliezer, Zipporah and I--went to the bath house at the mill on Friday afternoons to take a bath in separate rooms, one for the men and one for the women. Esther couldn't go at first because you had to be eight years old. Then before we sat down for the evening meal we had to wash our hands in the kitchen basin with water brought in from the spring, even if we had come directly from the bathhouse. Finally my mother lit the candles she used only on Shabat and we all sat down at the table, my father at the head, my mother next to him, Herman and Tamara next, and so on down the line from the oldest to the youngest. Each face turned towards my father was softly lit by the candle's flame, subdued, at peace.

Then my father blessed the challah, broke off pieces and gave one to

each of us, beginning with the oldest and finally working down to Zipporah, Esther and me. Sometimes I thought I would never be able to wait until I could bite into the soft bread just waiting for me beneath the crust. Would you believe that on Saturday morning I took the leftover challah and cut off the crust because I thought it was too hard? Oh, I would give anything to have a piece of challah now!"

"You've done it again!" the woman said. "I can't stand it! Can't you talk about anything beside food?"

I quit talking for the day.

We could never be sure exactly when we would be told to line up to march back, so the four of us used the toilets well before dusk. Most of the time we worked until the shadows from the ship's smokestacks had lengthened across the deck and spilled over into the sea. By the time we marched back, stood in the counting lines for several more hours and got in line again for supper, the sky was completely dark. At approximately seven or eight o'clock we were in our beds, hopeful of sleeping for a few hours before being roused in the middle of the night to unload the train cars.

One evening after we came back to camp and stood in the counting lines we were not dismissed for supper. Over and over we had been counted but the supervisors were never satisfied with the total. Finally one said, "A woman is missing! You will all stay where you are until you tell us where she is!"

I looked quickly down our row past Ellen, Lily and Esther and then at the row behind me. Many of the other women were also looking, their eyes darting back and forth. Each of us probably had the same thought: how could

anyone have escaped? All around us constantly were guards holding the leashes of German shepherds. If a woman so much as fell to the ground during the marches to and from work and did not rise up quickly the dogs were let loose, one flying at her throat, another at her chest, a third at her legs. Around these dogs and guards, around the entire camp, were high concrete walls strewn with a solid layer of barbed wire. At regular intervals were towers holding guards with guns, loaded and pointed down at us. If, by some miracle, a woman did succeed in eluding the dogs and guards and escape while at work outside the camp, where would she go? Ravensbrück was located in the heart of the Third Reich. When the Germans heard rumors of the camps, of the smoke smelling like burned flesh and belching from the crematorium stacks, they believed that their Führer would not do these things for no reason. Why even attempt escape?

On that evening we stood in our lines for four hours, for five hours, wondering where this woman could have gone. Snow began to fall, settling on our heads, on our coats, piling up in little hills on our feet. After several hours we were no more than rows of white poles in a drifted field.

Across from us was a barracks full of gypsy women, additional "spoilers of the race," who had been brought into camp after our arrival. Many of the women had entered the camp with their small children. They were made to stand outside in lines all day, all night, with bare feet, bare legs, babies crying ceaselessly in their arms. They stood so tonight, barely visible in the flurry of flakes ever piling up around us.

As my feet froze solid, legs and arms becoming completely numb, my mind began to drift with the snow, with the softness. I was six years old again. It was late spring and the gypsies were returning to Füleháza. As soon as Berta and Rose had heard that their crimson and yellow wagons had been

spotted jingling towards the village, they began to talk about the fortune teller. Every year a woman dressed in a long, black skirt and white blouse embroidered all along the flowing sleeves with brilliant red roses went from door to door telling fortunes. This year the gypsy woman finally came to our house late one afternoon when the sun had already begun to slide down behind the tallest trees on the mountain top. She climbed the steps to the house quickly, the tin bracelets on her wrists jangling, and knocked on the door. I watched from the swing under the tree in the side yard as Rose let out a squeal and said, "Come in! We've been waiting for you."

In a few more minutes I went inside, too, sitting on the far end of a bench by the kitchen table. The fortune teller was seated at the other end of the bench, Rose, Berta and Tamara all grouped around her. She was holding Rose's hand and gazing at it intently, her long braids swung forward. The coins entwined in her hair glinted in the light from the front window slanting across the table in long, yellow sweeps.

"Ah," she said after a few minutes. "I see a handsome young man in your future. He will fall in love with you as soon as he sees your lovely face."

Rose broke into laughter bouncing in the soft, warm air. "That's wonderful!" she cried. "Will he be rich, too?"

"Rich enough," the gypsy answered, tossing her braids behind her and smiling. "Who is next?"

Tamara had her fortune told and then Berta, who was promised a fine, young man and a happy, happy life. Then the gypsy woman saw me watching her from the end of the table. "You, little one, wouldn't you like to have your fortune told, too?" she asked. I had been afraid she would never ask me. I held out my hand and she stared at it for only a minute.

"Oh, you are going to travel over a big body of water." she said. "Someday you will marry a dark young man and have two children."

My mother, who had been watching from a corner of the kitchen, spoke for the first time. "So my little bird will fly away!" she laughed. "I've always known she would some day." She pressed several coins into the gypsy's hand. The woman rose and left the house.

"What a silly fortune!" I thought and ran back outside, swinging up into the highest branches of the tree.

"Achtung!" an SS supervisor was shouting. "Achtung!" She had come out from the barracks where she had been warm and dry, leaving us with several of the lesser guards. It was at least midnight. "We have found the missing woman," she continued. "One of the guards remembered that a woman died while at work this morning. You are dismissed." We stumbled towards the door, barely having the strength left to shake the snow from our bodies, and fell into bed, starved, frozen to the bone.

In the morning the number of women who did not get up was doubled, the pile of bodies by the barrack's door so large that it had to be broken down into two piles. As we waited in line I looked across at the barracks where the gypsies had still been standing when we went inside at midnight. Not one woman or child was to be seen, only piles of snow heaped into great, white mounds.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

By nightfall the end of the big toe on my right foot had turned completely black. When I showed it to the surgeon in the next bed she said, "Gangrene has set in. Every time your foot freezes the circulation is cut off. Little by little the flesh dies. The black part of your toe will have to come off or the cells will continue to deteriorate. If you like, tomorrow night I can cut off the gangrous part with my pen knife while it's still frozen."

The night passed in fits and starts. My toe throbbed, a sharp, persistent pain shooting out from the foot, traveling up the leg, circling round my back and chest, gyrating into my consciousness in endless,repeating spirals. Once towards morning I fell into a light sleep only to be awakened by a loud boom followed by screams, prolonged moans. One of the top bunks in the row next to us had fallen down on the two bunks below it, crashing on the sleeping women, carrying them all through the darkness to the floor. This happened often; in the mornings the women still lay as they fell, handfuls of straw sifted over the living asleep on the bodies of the dead.

When the guard came through the rows to wake us I climbed out of bed and hurried to the zielappel with the others, anxious for the cold to seep into my toes, freezing out the pain. I wanted to forget about the part of me that would be cut off and thrown away at the end of the day, but my mind worried it, turned it over and over.

It was one of those mornings when the guards decided, "Yes, they can have some coffee. Maybe it will make them move a little faster--the lazy pigs!"

When a volunteer was requested I piped up, "I'll go!" before any other woman had a chance to say anything. "Perhaps it will take my mind off my toe and I might even see some extra food," I thought.

I entered the kitchen and began walking toward the large, black iron stove where the pots of bitter coffee were left. As I passed an enormous, wooden table where women from the Gentile barracks were often cutting up vegetables, I saw a large iron kettle three feet across and three feet deep filled to overflowing with cooked potatoes steaming in their jackets. They were solid, mealy and white inside, the kind of potatoes my mother had grown in her garden, looking nothing at all like the half-rotted gray lumps that we were occasionally given at lunch. Glancing at the women prisoners stirring pots a few feet away, their back so me, I grabbed four of the hot potatoes, opened my coat, and slid them down the front of my dress. They tumbled to my chest, bouncing against my breasts and came to rest at the string tied round my waist. I jiggled up and down, tossing them from one spot to another as the burning skins pressed against my flesh.

From the other end of the kitchen a guard from another barrack started towards me. "Has she seen me?" I wondered, my heart thumping against a potato. I walked quickly to the stove and picked up a pot of coffee, summoning up all my strength to lift it with one hand while holding the other across my waist to keep the potatoes from slipping out and falling to the floor. Shuffling along as fast as I could, I carried the coffee back to our barracks and set it before a guard.

"You took long enough!" she said.

I said nothing, crossing my arms, cradling the outline of a potato in each hand. She heaved the pot of coffee up on a table and I padded over to where

Esther, Ellen and Lily were standing. When the coffee was poured we took our cups and edged away from the guards to a corner of the front hall where we were served all our meals. The three of them began to splash the liquid on their faces. I turned my back to the room, slipped a hand inside my dress, pulled out a potato, slid it up my sleeve, took Esther's hand and dropped it into her palm. Her eyes grew so large that I had to frown at her, telling her with my expression, "Don't react!" She received the message, lowered her eyes to the floor and inched the potato up under her coat sleeve. I followed the same procedure with Ellen and Lily. Throughout the morning each of us raised a hand to the mouth as if to cover a yawn, grabbed a bite of potato, chewed it slowly, teeth coming together only once in half a minute. It was almost dusk when I realized that I had not thought about my toe since morning.

That evening, as soon as we were all on our beds, the surgeon took out her pen knife and asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Good."

She sat directly across from me, the three other women from her bed behind her, watching. Ellen was on one side of me, Esther on the other.

"Put your foot here, in my lap," she said. "I'll cut as fast as I can."

"Yes, hurry," I answered. "I never liked that toe anyway."

"Always the fool," she laughed. "You play the role well."

"Don't be so sure that it's a role!" I answered.

She bent over my toe, head lowered, one hand cradling my foot, the other clasping the knife. She was completely absorbed in her work; I could see how well she must have performed in the hospital in Budapest. I took Esther's and Ellen's hands in mine and closed my eyes.

My little gypsy friend, Smarvana, and I are trying to cut the huge log in two with a rusty saw. The saw slips, rips a jagged line in my foot. Oh, how it swells! Mama carries me to the mill doctor early in the morning fog. I ride around all day on the tall shoulders of Gunther like a white heron on long, long legs, dipping and gliding, dipping and gliding as he lopes through the rolling fields of Transylvania. How grand it is to be tall like my father . . .

"Finished!" the surgeon said.

I opened my eyes. I had not felt anything.

"I grabbed some pieces of packing paper from the ship today," she was saying. "I'll wrap your toe in them. The bleeding should stop in a few minutes."

Blood was gushing from my toe, running steadily on to the straw, spreading in a pool around my foot. I wondered briefly where the dead piece had been placed and then saw some paper wadded into a ball, red-soaked, tossed to one side. "What's done is done," I thought and pressed my hands tight against the flow.

"Thank you, my lady doctor," I said.

"You are welcome. I will expect an office call again tomorrow night to see how you are progressing."

"Certainly."

The next morning my toe burned with pain as if the knife were cutting, cutting, ever cutting. Half-way through zielappel, however, the foot was frozen again and lost all feeling. Over the next few days the same process occurred. The open wound drained when the toe had defrosted and hurt with a dull pain that never went away, never lessened.

It must have been towards the end of December, perhaps more in the middle of the month, that hundreds of Jewish girls from the Scandinavian countries were brought into Ravensbrück; we had no way of keeping track of the days and could only estimate the time of year by the nature of the weather. These Scandinavian girls were very young, not more than fourteen or fifteen years old and quite fair, delicate. In the mornings when we left for work they were already standing in front of a barracks--coatless, heads shaved, barefoot, arms wrapped around themselves against the biting wind. When we returned at night they were still in the same positions. For three days they stood there . . . maybe four. Then they disappeared, like the Gypsies before them. We could never tell exactly where these women went but we could see the piles of dead heaped up each morning, higher and ever higher.

One morning we were taken out to be counted as usual at four in the morning but when the counting was over, the dead taken away, we were brought back inside the barracks for coffee. Then the guard said, "We won't work today. It's Christmas."

Christmas! The word was repeated, each woman forming the word over and over, the sibilants singing in the air. We were Jews and this was a Gentile holiday, but for the first time since we arrived we would not have to trudge over the frozen dirt, trudge up and down the steep ramps, hills and steps, trudge back again at night. Enmasse we came back to our beds and lay down, grateful for the opportunity to gain some extra sleep as we were still unloading train cars during half the night. After a few hours, we woke up one by one, stretched, smiled at each other and began to chat as if we were at home on a holiday, whiling away the quiet afternoon.

Again Lily asked me about the polenta; again I told her in detail.

Then the surgeon wanted to know if I knew how to make chicken soup with kreplach and I said, "Of course I know how," and told her exactly how much chicken to use, how much broth, how you added a pinch of this seasoning, a pinch of that, how you formed the dumplings, how you let the broth bubble until the dumplings were tender, perfect.

Once I started talking about preparing food there was no stopping me. I gave the recipes for gefilte fish, for stuffed cabbage, for baked sweet potatoes laced with honey and sprinkled with nutmeg, for rich, moist honey cake dripping with honey-orange sauce, for roast chicken, for goose, for lamb. Finally when I paused for breath, a woman from the next bed asked, "Did you do most of the cooking when you were still at home? I'm sure you were a great help to your mother."

"Well . . . " I said, suddenly remembering how my mother had constantly chased me out of the kitchen with her stirring spoon because I would not stop sticking my finger into all the bowls for a taste, "I helped some."

"Were those her recipes?" the same woman asked.

"Oh . . . some were hers. Some mine," I answered her, hoping that she never found out that I could not boil an egg without either burning my fingers or cracking the shell. My mother never let me stay in the kitchen long enough to learn how to cook. I watched, noshing away, until she cried again, "It will pour on your wedding day if you don't stop all that nibbling in my pots!" and whisked me out. I wish I had those recipes I gave out that day; I would love to see what I made up.

The day after Christmas while we stood in zielappel we saw healthy, well-dressed Gentile prisoners line up outside their barracks and begin marching

towards the back gate. The next morning more barracks, all Gentile, were emptied of prisoners, more women walked to the gate. At first we thought that they were being transferred to another camp. That night, however, Ellen came back from trading vegetables for bread and said that the Polish women had told her they were being sent home.

"Do you think they will let us go, too?" Lily asked. "Oh, I hope so. I don't know if I can stand this much longer. You don't know how terrible it is not to be able to see. All day I stumble around as if I'm in the middle of a bad dream where everything is blurry and terrifying."

"I know it must be very hard for you, Lily," Esther said. "It's hard for me and I can see. I can't even remember the last time I was happy . . . " She buried her face in the sleeve of her coat and began to cry.

"Come, girls," I said. "The war will end sometime. I want more than anything to see how it all ends. I want to see it to the finish! We've made it this far. We can make it a little further, can't we?"

"I can," Ellen said. "Anyway I can as long as nobody shoots me."

"Good girl!" I said, smiling at her trusting face, so full of courage for one so young.

"Esther, you can't give up," I said. "You're my sister and I won't let you! And Lily, you can't give up either. We'll carry you if nothing else."

She put her hand on my shoulder. "Could we go to sleep now?" she asked. "I'm so tired I can barely keep my eyes open."

The four of us lay down, settling into our positions easily, knowing by now every board on the bed, the slot for each arm and leg among all the other arms and legs, and fell asleep, Lily's hand resting on my shoulder.

The next day while we worked the air became almost balmy. The sun

came out once more after it seemed as if it had been lost forever behind the layer of clouds arching over, thick and gray. Melting began and while we had to walk through mud and slush it was better than trying to hobble on the clogs; the packed snow stuck to the bottom of our shoes and we walked on a wedge of snow all day long. However, the snow and freezing wind was replaced by the increased infestation of lice; they thrived in the warm weather. During our noon break the four of us went to a corner of the kartoffenkeller, removed our coats and picked off the lice one by one. Once we had our coats deloused we started on our arms and legs, plucking at the flat, hoary parasites stuck fast by their claws and sucking mouths. When Esther, Ellen and I were finished one of us deloused Lily.

One day when it was my turn and I was picking them off her neck--one! two! three!--and throwing them to the ground, Ellen teased. "For someone who didn't know what a louse was when we walked through the gate, you sure are doing a good job!"

"But I learned, didn't I?" I laughed and, with the heel of my shoe, ground to a pulp all the lice crawling at my feet.

Then, when we came back to work one night, the SS guards did not take us back to our barracks. We were marched instead to an enormous canvas tent pitched near two tall, brick smokestacks. The first thing I noticed was the stench of burning flesh swelling through the entire tent, pressing against our nostrils, assaulting our mouths and throats. On days when the wind was blowing towards us from the crematorium we went to sleep pinching our noses closed.

There were no bunk beds in the tent, only an inadequate number of cots with boards for mattresses. If a group of women came in late from work and

the beds were full, they had to sleep on the ground. We longed for that which only a few days earlier had seemed unbearable--our crowded barracks bed and a single toilet. We wondered: is Germany losing the war after all? The camp seemed to be in the process of disintegration. The small amount of food that we had been given became even less; some days we got soup, some days we did not.

Another night when we returned to camp, filing into the tent one by one or two by two, shoulders slumped, heads sunk against our chests, we sensed that something was different and raised our heads. With a great amount of curiosity a number of Jewish women were staring at us from the cots. They were dressed in striped pants and striped jackets, their faces full, bodies rounded. As we passed by them, trying to find a place on the ground to lie down, they yelled at us in Yiddish, a language most of our group could not understand. When no one responded to their yells they began to kick at some of the women, screaming even louder than before.

As quickly as we could, Ellen, Esther, and I pulled Lily to a corner and sank against the wall. "Who are they? What are they shouting?" asked Lily.

"I don't know who they are," I answered. "They keep saying, 'What kind of Jews are you that you don't speak Yiddish?'"

"What do they mean by that?" Esther asked.

"I recognize the dialect," Ellen said. "These women are from Poland. They think all Jewish people speak Yiddish, I guess."

"They must have been sent here from another camp," I said. "From the looks of them it was a better one than this one."

"Those warm pants!" Esther said. "I wish we had some like that."

"I don't like it," I said. "These women won't do us any good. I'm sure of it."

In the morning the new prisoners pushed their way in front of us as we went outside to be counted, pushed to the front of the line for coffee, pushed their way into the line for the kartoffenkeller. They did not know where they were being taken; we wanted to be in that line so they shoved us out as a matter of course. Our days of nibbling on turnips and carrots at work, of hiding radishes in my coat, were over. We spent the long days shoveling sand into a cart, hauling it to a pile across a field, dumping it and trudging back for more. This work was especially hard on Lily who tripped often while walking across the plain of dim shapes and dull colors mottled by the dust.

"Have you talked to anyone? Have you found where these new prisoners are from?" I asked Ellen one night.

"They have been in a camp in Poland for three and a half years," she answered, "in a special labor detail."

"What was the name of the camp?"

"Auschwitz."

"I never heard of it."

"No, neither have I."

One morning after the SS had brought in the prisoners from Auschwitz we were ordered to line up for counting as usual. The weather had turned cold again and I was waiting for my foot to freeze, head down, hands clenched inside the pockets of my coat. Then a color in front of me flicked briefly in the corner of my eye and I looked up, brown and beige squares weaving in and out in front of me. So astounded that I could not put into thoughts what was startling me, I kept staring at the colors, at the plaid. Then, with a jolt, I realized what I was staring at--the jacket I had made for Tamara. The woman

in front of me was wearing the jacket I had sewn for Tamara! She had been wearing it the last time I saw her in Reghinal-Sasesc. I would have known the cut, the fabric, the hand-stitching anywhere. "It can't be! It can't be Tamara!" I thought. "She's shorter than this woman." Only one thing could have happened: Tamara had been deported to Auschwitz, her clothes taken from her and handed out to other prisoners. The woman in front of me from Auschwitz had been given the jacket I made for Tamara almost eight years ago.

All this time I had continued to imagine Tamara and Herman, my mother, all the others, as I had left them in Reghinal-Seasec--alive, as well as possible, still living in those rooms. "Have all of them been taken to Auschwitz," I wondered. "Have they been put in work details like us? Even my mother?" I did not come to know the full implications of being taken to Auschwitz if you were not a young, healthy woman having no small children until years later.

Sick at heart, I shoveled sand all during that day and the rest of the days we were in Ravensbrück, thinking of Tamara. I thought of speaking to one of the women from Auschwitz about her, but I knew they would never be able to tell me about Tamara. None of us had names, only numbers. Some of the girls from our group knew my name; after I was asked to translate for them a number of times they asked me who I was, and I told them. I did not think anyone would know Tamara's name, however, and how could I describe her? She was short, but so were many other women.. She had a voice so beautiful that I used to pretend I was in a great theater when she sang to us in the kitchen after supper, but she would not sing in a camp. Then I remembered the opera singer. Oh, if only Tamara did not sing! Let her not have sung. But can a bird not sing? Even in prison it swells into song.

Around the middle of January we were marched to the front of a building I had not seen before and told that we were going to be taken to a different camp. "Remove all of your clothes!" an SS guard ordered. "Inside this building you will take a bath." We undressed in the middle of the street that ran through the camp. Those of us from Budapest were by now no more than little twigs shivering in the cold. This time we threw off our clothes quickly, all embarrassment gone in the face of the promise of a bath. Our clothes were crawling with lice, inside and out, our hair nested with lice, more lice creeping over our skin.

We entered the building, lined up in rows, suffered the cutting of all the hair on our bodies once more, were handed ragged summer dresses marked with large criss-crosses like before, and thin raincoats--all covered with lice. We had given up our old, familiar lice only to be given new ones. We came out again into the cold, a drop of water never touching our bodies, shivering in our light clothes and were taken to a barracks exactly like the one we had left two weeks earlier. Half of us were put in the room on the left, the other half on the right.

That night after supper an SS supervisor came to us and announced, "In the morning there will be a transport to a new camp. Not all of you will be going. I'll read off the numbers of those who will leave."

She started to read the numbers and after a long while read 85803, my number. A few minutes later she read Lily's. She finished, having read neither Ellen's nor Esther's numbers, and strode quickly out of the room. A great cry went out, a moan that welled up from the bottom of despair. In the morning sister would be separated from sister, cousin from cousin, friend from friend. Each pair would be cut in two, leaving every woman far less than half

of what she had been in a pair. Having a sister, a cousin or a friend in the camp with you was sometimes the only thing that gave you the courage to go on; each lived solely for the other.

On our bed Esther and Ellen were sobbing hysterically, clinging first to Lily and then to me while on the bed beside us two young girls had their arms around each other, crying into each other's shoulders. Finally, after a long while, one broke away. Sensing me looking at her, she turned and said, "My sister and I have never been apart. I would do anything to stay with her. She's all I have left."

"You know what?" I said to her, wondering why I had not thought of the idea sooner. "Nobody knows your name and nobody knows my name. All anybody knows is the number on our coats. Our new dresses don't even have a number. I'll just change coats with you. Then I can stay here with my sister and you can go with yours. Or we can do the opposite, whichever you like."

She grabbed me, hugging me fiercely. "I'll stay!" she said after she let go, tears running from the corners of her eyes. "You go."

"Fine! I would love to get out of here!"

Ellen was able to make the same kind of trade and the four of us lay down to sleep.

Early the next morning when the four of us and the other women whose numbers had been called were sitting on the floor of a large, flat wagon, I saw the same girl with whom I had traded coats come out of the barracks, hand in hand with her sister. We were all being taken to a new camp; the counting off of numbers, the separating, was simply an exercise. I imagine an SS supervisor was bored and said, "Let's tell half of those Jews that they're going away and the other half that they're not. Their reaction should be amusing,

to say the least." We did not know it at the time, but the Russian army was rapidly advancing towards Germany. The eastern camps were being closed and the Jewish prisoners taken to camps further west and south. As the wagon rolled out of camp I asked a guard for the date, wanting to know exactly when we were able to leave Ravensbrück at last, even if for another camp.

"It's January nineteenth," she answered, "as if that means anything to you."

We were in Ravensbrück for four months by calendar time. There are other kinds of time, however, immeasureable time, when the days and nights fall into a vast, black wasteland as deep and wide as the immensities of space. Such was the nature of time in Ravensbrück.

When we arrived at the railroad tracks we were ordered to line up beside a long train sitting on a side rail. The four of us joined hands, clasping each other's palms so tightly that the SS would have had to chop off our hands to get us apart. We followed the line of women up high, metal steps into a cattle car, an enormous, wood box whose plank sides reached up high around us. A small amount of straw was scattered on the floor. Toilet buckets stood by the door. Otherwise there was nothing but the cold. A layer of snow clung to the outside of the car, a coating of frost to the inside. As we filed into the car an SS guard counted us one by one. The four of us sat down near the door.

"That's a hundred!" a guard yelled shortly after we entered the car.

"Good!" the SS supervisor standing by the next car replied. "Don't put in anymore. A hundred to a car should do it."

"How many cars do we have?"

"Five. There are about five hundred of them so it should work out perfect."

"Good planning!"

"Yes!"

"Where are we shipping them?"

"To Dachau."

Half an hour later, when the five cars were full, a guard came through the cars and gave each of us a small chunk of cheese and a slice of bread. It was our rationing for the next three days. Then the steps were taken away and the heavy, metal door was pulled shut, the loud clang reverberating in the frigid air like the crack of a glacier crashing into the ocean. A pale shaft of blue-white light filtered down on us from a small opening in the ceiling of the car, fell on the four of us huddled together near the center. We formed a square, Esther and Ellen on one side, Lily and I on the other, face to face, leg touching leg, a small island in the sea of women.

When the shaft of light had faded to a dim gray, finally disappearing altogether, it left nothing but the icy blackness clutching at our arms, hands, legs, chests and feet, at our very insides. Those who had been crying the night before at the separations, those who had sisters or cousins in the camp, must have been separated after all when we were packed inside the cars; on our car were women, many of them the prisoners from Auschwitz, who were all strangers to each other. Yet as the cold became even more bitter, the darkness complete, individual women began to move towards each other, seeking the warmth of another body.

The four of us moved together even more. "I can't stand this much longer," Lily whispered to me. "It's so dark. It's so terribly dark! And I'm cold! I'm cold! Oh, I'm so cold!" She was shivering violently, her whole body convulsing.

"I'll try and warm you a little," I said, putting my arms around her. Esther and Ellen leaned against our legs, their feet curled under them. If we could have crawled inside each other's bodies we would have done so. In the morning all of the hundred women had crept so closely together that half the car was empty.

For six days and six nights we counted the coming and going of the light in the roof opening. The door was never opened. At the beginning of the seventh day a guard knocked on the side of the car. "Ist dere tote?" (Are there any dead?), she asked. We looked around. Here a woman sat with head fallen to one side, mouth hanging open; there a woman lay pressed against the side of the car, legs bent backward. "Der sind tote," I called back. The door was unbolted, opened, the dead shoved out into a cart sitting beside the tracks. The fresh air blew in, pouring over us like a cool draught of water. As we traveled into a warmer climate the air inside our sealed cars had become thick and rancid. The SS guard returned with a box of dry bread and handed each of us a piece--our first food in six days. Then she picked up our toilet pails which had barely anything in them; if you are not fed you do not need to eliminate.

"Who wants to get some water in these pails?" she asked.

I volunteered, wanting desperately to get out of the car for a while.

"No, no, don't leave me . . . " Lily cried, her eyes welling with tears.

"I'll come right back," I said. "I promise."

Another woman and I stumbled down the steps to a faucet in the station. We filled the bucket only half full, knowing we could not carry more, and dragged it back to the train. However, we could not lift it up into the car.

As I was struggling with it, I spotted three frozen potatoes lying under the train, set the bucket down, grabbed the potatoes and called to Esther, "Take these, quickly!" Finally, with the help of three other women, I lifted the bucket into the car. "Well, where are the potatoes?" I asked Esther as soon as I was sitting again.

"What potatoes?" she asked.

Someone else had grabbed them. The door was closed, bolted. The next morning we began to move again for the first time in three days after sitting on a side rail.

As the heat, the stale air, pressed in upon us over the following eight days, the women fought for the absence of bodily contact as fervently as they had once sought it. We took off our raincoats and our dresses and sat in our thin undershirts, almost naked, but nothing helped. In the daytime the light coming from the skylight made possible a distancing and we sat carefully avoiding touching each other. The presence of light served as well to chase away the demons that came to torment us in the cars where we remained day after day after day. The nights, however, became infinitely long nightmares.

"Ahhhhiieeeeee . . . " a woman would scream as the skylight grew black. Another would take up the wild cry and then another, the screams bouncing back and forth on the walls of the car as we moved through the dark countryside or stood on a lonely platform. When the screeching began to die, the sobbing to become less hysterical, a sharp whack sounded as a woman struck out at the unknown arm or leg that dared to touch hers.

"Oh! Oh! No! Oh! Nooooooooo . . . " a voice would howl. The crying would resume again, beginning in loud, forlorn sobs and gradually

lessening to a prolonged weeping like that of a child taken from her mother. Often one of the women from Auschwitz attacked a Hungarian girl, pounding at her with her fists. These women had come into our camp well-fed and still had strength. When a Hungarian girl was attacked in this way she often cried out, "Sereń! Sereń! Help me! Sereń . . . " I had translated for her in the camp, saving her from a beating, and she thought I could save her again, but I was so weak myself that I could not help her.

On the tenth night as we were sitting back to back, Lily by my side and a Hungarian girl leaning on my back, I began to hurt from the pressure of her against me. She weighed very little, each of us by now so thin that almost all the flesh was wasted away. We often sat with our hands under our buttocks to ease the pressure on the upper thigh bones protruding from our skin. I knew that this Hungarian girl leaned her back against mine because she was too weak to sit up in any other way, but I could not bear even her slight weight upon me. Finally I said, "Please don't lean against me."

She did not move; she could not. After a little while I asked again, "Could you not lean against me? It hurts me so." Still she did not move. Finally I decided, "I'll have to give her a little shove." I raised my arm. It fell to the floor like a lead weight before I could touch her.

Thus I could not help the Hungarian girls who were abused mercilessly by the Polish women, hardened and bitter after having been in Auschwitz for so long. They asked us repeatedly, "When were you taken to Ravensbrück?"

"In the fall of 1944," I answered.

"That is nothing! We have been in Auschwitz since 1940." Then they struck out at the Hungarian girls who did not understand Yiddish. Perhaps because I understood the language they did not harm me. However, they taunted

me unceasingly. Finally one day when one of them said for the hundredth time, "Your time in Ravensbrück was nothing compared to mine in Auschwitz!" I answered, "Was it my fault that you were in camp for so long?" After that they left me alone, Esther, Ellen and Lily as well.

By the eleventh night the number of women in our car was less than half the original hundred. A guard had knocked on our door several more times, asking only after the dead. The toilet buckets were removed as well. The last bits of straw had been eaten several days ago. On this night the SS women did not come near the car. We were parked on a side rail as we had been for the past three days, never moving, and the women's screams seemed to have reached an even greater intensity. The hunger gnawing at our flesh was eating at our sanity as well. Suddenly the door was unlocked and thrown open. Two men wearing the Vermacht uniform stood at the door, staring.

"Jesus Christ!" one of them said.

The other said nothing, turning abruptly and walking away. In a few minutes he was back with an armful of turnips. He flung them into the car and closed the door again. Quickly I reached out and grabbed a large one that had landed near my feet. It seemed to weigh far more than a turnip normally did until I remembered that I was weak. Esther took hold of one end and I the other and we broke it in two and then in four pieces. I put Lily's portion in her hand and began to chew on mine. She ignored it, continuing to lean against my shoulders, her eyes closed.

"Eat, Lily," I said. "Someone will take your piece away from you if you don't."

Still she sat, not moving, saying nothing. I shook her. "Lily! Wake up! I have a piece of turnip for you."

At last she sat up slowly and opened her eyes. "You can have it," she said.

"No, Lily! It's for you. Now eat it!"

"I don't want it . . . I am so tired . . . I don't know . . . "

"What, Lily? What don't you know?"

"I don't know if I can go on any longer. The screams . . . and I am so terribly tired. I can't see anything . . . I don't think I can make it."

"Lily, Lily . . . You can make it! You have to! You have to make up your mind that you will make it."

"I don't know if I can anymore. . . . "

"You can't if you don't eat. Now eat this piece of turnip. I promised your mother I would look after you. Eat it for me. Please, Lily."

She took the turnip and held it to her mouth, nibbling on it slightly. When she fell asleep, her head in my lap, it was still in her hand. I took it from her and hid it in my pocket to give back to her later.

The next morning, the twelfth day, she looked so pale and lifeless that I picked up her frail, sleeping body and cradled her in my lap. Her skin was albescent in the soft light coming from the opening in the roof, the deep shadows under her cheekbones almost invisible, eyelashes spreading across her face in delicate fans. She woke up, blinking once or twice, and looked at me for a long time, her large, dark eyes filling with tears. Finally she said, "I'm not going to live anymore, Sereń." Before I could answer she put her head on my breast and died.

Two hours later the Red Cross opened up the cars and gave us soup.

On the fourteenth day, two days after Lily died, the train reached Türkheim. The locked cars were opened and we climbed down from them at last. Those who had died during the past few days were still on the car, heaped in a corner. I had by now cried all I could for Lily, the tears washing down my face and soaking my dress until I was exhausted. Lily's death was equally painful for Esther and Ellen. The four of us together had seemed indestructible. Now we were only three.

With quick glances we looked one last time at the bodies in the corner, their faces to the end wall as if the rows of backs, of shorn heads, would give them anonymity. It was futile. I knew exactly where Lily lay--on the bottom, next to the right wall, one foot curved slightly outwards. "Lily! Lily! . . . " I cried one last time, only my heart speaking, and hurried down the steps, grasping Ellen's and Esther's hands.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

On the platform beside the train we lined up again for counting, numbering less than two hundred; for over three hundred women the thin fiber of hope, frayed thread by thread during the long months in Ravensbrück, became even more tattered in the locked cars until the last, shabby strand snapped, and they died. We had been brought to a camp called Turkheim, a small section of the larger camp, Dachau. As we stumbled from the train platform, almost unable to walk after fourteen days of sitting on the floor, we passed through a gate and a long corridor lined on both sides by high fences edged with barbed wire. Several men were on the other side of the fence, the first men we had seen since leaving Budapest. They looked healthy and were dressed in work pants and jackets. I wondered at first if they were German civilians come to stare at us. However, on second glance I knew them to be Jewish men.

Then I noticed a peculiar thing. The women walking ahead of me kept stopping and half-turning back, raising an outstretched arm in my direction. As I drew near to where one of the men was standing on the other side of the fence, I heard him ask, "Do you know Sereń Tuvel? Is she with you? . . . Sereń Tuvel--is she here?"

"Yes," the woman a few yards ahead of me answered. "She's right behind me."

When I reached the man who was asking for me, I knew who it was immediately. "Joseph!" I said, stopping opposite him.

"Sereń?" he asked. "Are you Sereń Tuvel?"

"Yes! Don't you recognize me?"

His eyes looked blank. In an instant I was outside my body, looking at myself as he must have seen me: a skeleton with a few patches of hair on her skull, clothed in scraps of rags, bits of skin still clinging to the frame. When we removed our coats and dresses in the sweltering cars, we had nothing between us and the sides and floor but a thin undershirt. As day after day passed and we were not fed, our bodies began to devour themselves, the flesh to disappear, the skin to chafe between the pressures of the bones on the inside and the hard surfaces on the outside. The knuckles on my hands were rubbed raw, dirty skin curling around the ridges, my ankles, also raw. The white of bone showed on my lower legs. My buttocks were nothing but bones protruding through the skin. Where the skin was not gone, it separated from the bone, puffing up in bubbles.

I spoke to him again. "You're Joseph, Herman and Tamara's son. You called out to be one night near Budapest. I am Sereń! And this is Esther beside me."

"Yes, I see . . . " he answered slowly, as if he were speaking in a dream. Then he pushed a chunk of bread through the holes in the fence. "Here, I brought this for you."

"Ah, Joseph, you never forget me. How did you know I was coming?"

"We heard that a group of Hungarian women was being brought into the camp today. I knew you left Budapest with some women last August. I also knew you would still be alive."

The guards were ordering us to move forward.

"I'll come back later!" he called as we moved away.

We passed through the corridor and came into a huge yard. I saw no

barracks, only low, flat roofs almost level with the ground. We were taken to one of these cellar-like buildings, descending the steps to an underground bunker. "Over there!" an SS guard, a man, commanded; the SS women guards had left us once our train arrived at the camp. The guard was pointing to a far corner of the room where two rows of wood planks stretched out on the dirt floor. On the other side of the room a group of Jewish women was edging into the opposite corner. As we began moving towards the planks several of them cried, "My God! Who are they?"

We were given some blankets and then the SS guards left. I stretched out between Esther and Ellen, glancing at these women on the other side of the room. Like Joseph, they were dressed in warm, clean jackets and trousers, having no holes or rips in them. They looked so healthy! Some of the women had rolled up the sleeves of their jackets, exposing thick arms, firm muscles. Their faces were full, without deep hollows, without the cheekbones almost cutting through the skin. As they continued to stare at us, shuddering, crowding ever more into their corner, a woman with a red kerchief tied around her hair finally called out to us, "Where are you from?"

"Ravensbrück," one of our group answered in a listless voice.

"Have you heard of that?" the same woman asked another in her group.

"No. Wherever it is, they must not have fed them," the second woman answered.

"Do you go out to work here?" a woman from our side asked.

"Yes," the woman with the red kerchief answered, "we go out each morning to the farms around here and work in the fields."

"Are you fed there?"

"Oh, yes. The farm wives feed us well. We have bread and meat and

potatoes every noon and all the milk we want. At night we have another meal."

A low moan began on our side of the room, swelled, rose up with one voice as we pictured the hot food, the heaping bowls of potatoes, the plates of meat still simmering in their juices, the pitchers of milk, tall and cool, drops of moisture collecting on the sides.

Suddenly the planks beneath us began to tremble. In another instant the entire room, the very ground, was shaking, deep, low explosions thundering all around us. "This is why we're in bunkers," I realized. I grabbed Esther's hand before she began to scream. She burrowed into one side of me, Ellen crawled close on the other, and we lay face down, waiting out the bombing. As we lay still I kept thinking, "If only we can work at the farms! If only we can work at the farms!" I barely heard the roaring as I imagined eating and eating until I could eat no more. After about an hour had passed the bombing stopped. Several of the women from our group left the bunker to wander outside in the early evening light in search of something to eat--straw, grass, a bit of rotten potato. As I still had the chunk of bread from Joseph, the three of us stayed inside, divided the bread and chewed it slowly, savoring our first food in a week. Then one of the women came down the steps and called, "Sereń. A man is asking for you by the fence."

"It's my nephew, Joseph. I'll be right there," I answered. I began to put on my shoes but Esther and Ellen grabbed ahold of me, Esther clinging to the hem of my dress and Ellen to a foot. "It's all right," I said. "I'll be back in a few minutes. I promise. Maybe he'll even have more food for us." They let go and I dragged myself up the steps and to the fence.

"I brought some more bread," he said when I arrived. "Is there anything else you need, anything I can get for you?"

"My toe drains all the time. Part of it had to be cut off. I can barely stand to wear my shoes. Could you get some bandages?"

"There are some in my barracks. Will you wait here while I go and get some?" he asked.

"Where would I go?" I laughed. He looked at the ground, his hands sliding into his pockets. Then he turned, taking off at a run, vigorous like his mother, Tamara. "I won't tell him that I saw her jacket on a prisoner from Auschwitz," I decided. "Hopefully she is no longer there. I wonder why they did not send her to Ravensbrück with the other women? I wonder what they have done with her . . . "

Joseph was back in several minutes with a handful of bandages. "I can't stay long," he said. "A guard might see us and keep me from coming back."

"Do you work on the farms, too, Joseph?" I asked. "You look so good!"

"Yes, we eat only breakfast here. We're given dinner and supper on the farm."

"Do you think we'll work there, too?"

"I don't know." He let his eyes rest briefly on the raw knuckles of the hand holding the bandages. "I hope so . . . I have to go now. I'll be back whenever I can."

The next morning thin broth and dry crusts of bread were brought to us in our bunker. No one beat us awake, no one ordered us to line up for counting, no one formed a work detail and marched us to the farms. The women on the other side of the bunker ate their meal hurriedly, as if they could not endure being near our filth and lice for a minute longer than necessary, and hurried up the stairs to the outside. Several women from our group also climbed the stairs. As soon as they opened the door we heard a man shout, "Go back! Go back!"

"But we want to work on the farms . . . " a woman answered.

"Go back!"

The women descended the stairs, fell onto the floor, buried their heads in their arms and wept.

I do not know exactly how the next five or six weeks passed. As we realized that we were to be kept in a hole in the earth, kept from any opportunities of obtaining extra food, kept hidden away like half-crazed creatures while the bombs fell and fell, the days and nights began to spill over into each other, blend, come and go haphazardly. Sometimes I was positive that it was morning, that I had slept through the night despite the bombs ever exploding above us. When I looked up, however, the women who went out to work were still sleeping. Either I had slept through a night and the entire next day or I had been asleep for only a few hours; I could never be sure which it was. Sometimes I went to sleep with the question: why do they keep us here when we could still work? Seemingly days later the answer would almost come. Then I would lapse into a half-sleep and a few hours later ask the same question, as if I had thought of it anew.

If the bombing ceased temporarily we could go outside and walk around in the yard of the camp. Once in a while Esther, Ellen and I did this, searching for a sliver of carrot or a potato peel buried in the dirt. Several times Joseph came to the fence in the evening and asked for me. He always came bearing food, whatever he had been able to hide in his clothes. Many times, however, his group worked until late in the night and he could not come at all.

Then one night he came to say goodbye. Perhaps it was the middle of March by this time. The weather was turning warmer. "I'm not coming back tomorrow," he said that night.

"Are you being let go?" I asked quickly.

"No, but the war will end very soon. I'm sure of it. The farmer I work for has agreed to hide me in a shed until it does. It's only a matter of days, weeks, until it's over."

"Why will he hide you?"

"The Germans know that they're losing. When the war's over they will be punished for their crimes against us. He's hiding me to make himself look as if he sympathizes with us. He's been better than some, though. I should let him hide me, don't you think?"

"Of course! Joseph, do you know why we aren't taken out to work, too?"

He looked quickly away. Slowly he brought his eyes back to mine. "You would come in contact with the German citizens if you worked on the farms. They believe that throughout the war all Jews have been given what I am given now--good clothes, good food, a clean bed. If the SS allowed them to see you and the other women then the civilians would know the truth. Bones don't stick out of people who are given enough to eat."

"So we are kept hidden away, like in Ravensbrück. We saw no one from the outside there. Here we see no one either. It's this isolation that's killing us."

"Yes . . . but it will all be over soon. You must believe that, Sereń! I'm pretty sure that this camp will be evacuated in a few more days. You must not give up hope!"

"Don't worry! I'm going to live! If I make it on nothing but sheer will power alone, I will live. I have to see how it all ends. I'll be here on the day when it's finally over. Maybe not the day after--but on that day I'll be alive."

He handed me some more bandages and a penknife. "Whatever happens, take these and use them. I think you'll need them. Wherever they take you, it will be by foot. I'll come and find you when it's over," he said again as he began to walk away. "I promise."

Early one morning several days later an SS guard tramped down the stairs and announced, "This camp is being evacuated. You are being transferred to another camp, Burgau. Be ready to begin walking in half an hour."

As we began to heave ourselves up from the floor, to put on our shoes, wondering where we would summon up the strength to walk for days as we had during labor camp when we were strong and healthy, one of the women from our group came in from the outside. She hurried down the steps, walked over to another woman standing close to me, and whispered something in her ear. The two of them immediately hobbled up the steps as fast as they could. Although I had not heard all that had been whispered, I had heard the one word that sent me up the stairs right after them--potato. I followed the two women outside, hearing Esther and Ellen calling up from the basement, "Seren! Come back! Seren . . . " but continued after the women anyway. I fast-shuffled across the yard to a food cellar which someone had discovered was full of potatoes. It had very small windows, not over a foot wide.

One of the women began to smash in a window with her foot and in another instant I was also kicking, using the bottom of my wooden clogs. As soon as the glass was broken out I dived through it, determined to be the first one in the cellar, and scrambled onto a whole pile of potatoes. The other women--there were by now twenty or thirty who had heard of the discovery--fell in after me. Like lunatics we began stuffing potatoes up our

sleeves, in our coat pockets, down the fronts of our dresses. When the bosom of my dress was so full of potatoes that I looked as if I had sprouted enormous bulges, I climbed out of the window again, wiggling through sideways. My feet had become so skinny that a shoe fell off as I crawled out and it landed inside the cellar. As a guard was running towards the cellar, I stood up, heaved up my bosom with both arms and hurried back to the bunker, bobbing up and down with one shoe on, one shoe off.

When I reached the bunker the three of us divided the potatoes, distributing them equally among our bosoms. After we were outside forming lines to leave the camp, I whispered to Esther and Ellen, "Don't worry! Don't say anything! I'm going back to the bunker to see if I can find another shoe."

"No, don't go!" Esther said, grabbing my arm. "You're always running off. Please stay with me!"

"I can't walk with only one shoe! I'll be right back."

Breaking loose from her grasp, I ducked down the stairs when no one was looking and scanned the floor quickly. There in the corner of the bunker was a leather, laced shoe. I limped over and picked it up. It was for my right foot, the foor that already had a shoe. I slipped it on my left foot nonetheless and clambered back up the stairs, rejoining Esther and Ellen. Locking hands, we slowly began shuffling out through the gates of Turkheim.

For two days we walked on the road, dragging along inch by inch, foot by foot, the women sometimes toppling over into the ditch at the side of the road as if in slow motion, crumpling slightly, the dust slowly easing down over their still forms. With us on the road through the country that was disintegrating mile by mile were hundreds of fleeing Germans: soldiers who had lost their guns, tramping by us on their way to Switzerland, to France; wounded

soldiers making their way as slowly as we, crutches sometimes falling from beneath their arms as they stumbled on the loose rocks; fathers pushing small, red carts heaped up with pillows and comforters, a rocking chair tied on one end, the mother and small children following closely behind. As the Allied Armies advanced, many of the civilians left their homes, beds unmade, dirty dishes piled in the sink, the front door open, and took to the roads leading out of Germany, fearing for their lives.

Although we did not comprehend it entirely at the time, the SS was even more anxious to out-distance the advancing armies. They were still trying to eliminate those of us, only a hundred or so women out of the original ten thousand, who had refused to die. By this time we were too weak and too ill to want to be let go; there was no place to go. We needed food. We needed care. Who would give these to us? We wanted only one thing: the end of the war. We lived for that day--nothing more.

Sometime near the middle of March we reached Burgau, another small camp located in the middle of grassy fields, crops of grain planted all around. The perimeters of the camp were marked by tall electric fences, at each corner a cubicle and a guard, his rifle aimed down into the enclosed area. Inside this fenced-in yard were freshly-painted, gray buildings with windows clean and sparkling and rows of bunk beds, their images shimmering on the shiny floors. The odor of soap and hot, sudsy water emanated from the doorsills and windowsills, from the bedsteads, from the walls. Again I realized how the concentration camps could vary immensely. If the camp was hidden away in a dark forest, like Ravensbrück, it was no more than a filthy, cold cave, while those camps out in the open, like Burgau, shone, full of light, as immaculate as the kitchens of the hausfraus.

The camp was deserted. We filed into the empty rooms quietly and sank down on the hard beds. Those of us who had survived the walk, less than eighty women, were exhausted from the effort of dragging our ragged selves along with nothing to sustain us. It had been weeks since we had been given any food, the one meal a day gradually diminishing to nothing at all. Esther, Ellen and I tried to ration the potatoes I had grabbed, allowing ourselves one every day. When they were gone, two days after we arrived at Burgau, we went out into the yard to look for scraps.

When we came outside the area around the building seemed different--rougher than I had remembered it. "Something's changed," I said. "I can't tell what it is."

"The grass is gone!" Ellen answered. "I'm sure there was grass all around here. Now the ground is all chopped up."

As we rounded a corner of the building we came upon a woman crawling over the dirt on her hands and knees, head down, spoon clutched in one hand. She came to a large board and after a few, futile attempts, managed to move it, exposing some yellowed grass. With a grunt she began digging at the ground with her spoon, tearing at the roots, cutting them out of the soil. As soon as she had a clump loose, she shook it briefly to let the dirt fall and then shoved the grass into her mouth, roots and all, chewing contentedly.

For a minute we stared at her. In another minute we were also on our hands and knees, looking for hidden grass. Do you know how delicious even the simplest meal tastes when you are genuinely hungry? That's how the grass tasted that day. Several days later anything that resembled grass was gone--the pale white shoots coming up under rocks, the soft roots of thistles, the tender interior of young trees.

Esther was growing weaker, the bones below her waist no more than thin white lines poking out from her protruding hipbones. She spent most of the time lying on the bed. If I decided to go outside she immediately noticed that I was putting on my shoes. "Don't go," she begged. "Your toe will just hurt more if you put your shoes on. Stay here with me . . . "

"Ellen will stay with you, won't you, Ellen?" I would answer, continuing to put on my shoes.

Ellen did not want me to leave either, but she usually answered, "I'll stay--if you come right back."

"Why are you always afraid I'll leave you? I would leave my sister and my best, true friend? Is that what you think?"

"No, no," Ellen answered. "I don't think that . . . it's just . . . "

Neither of them had recovered from Lily's death, nor had I. I knew this was at the base of their fears. Reassuring them one more time, I went outside, spoon in hand.

As I was on my way to a far corner of the yard one day, ready to dig up worms if I found no new shoots, I passed a window in one of the barracks. Suddenly I jumped back, terrified, the blood pounding so hard in my light head that I thought I would faint. An old, wrinkled crone was peering at me out of eyes sunk deep into the sockets--a bony ghost come to call. Quickly I looked behind me to see who she was, this head on a stick, frightening me more than anything I had ever seen. No one was there. I looked back at the window. "It's me," I realized. "The ghost is me. I've become an old woman . . . " The last time I had looked into a mirror was the morning I left Budapest as a young woman; now an eighty year old looked back at me. "Forget what you saw!" I

told myself and walked on. Thereafter each time I passed a window I looked the other way.

One warm spring day the three of us were outside, sitting on a step in front of the barracks, trying not to talk about food but unable to stop ourselves. "Do you remember when we dug out the raisins from Mama's rolls and hid them under our plates?" I was asking Esther. "How could we have done such a thing?"

"That was long ago . . . " she answered. Before she could continue a series of thuds sounded nearby. Something was being thrown over the back fence and landing in the yard.

"Potatoes!" someone began to scream. "It's raining potatoes!"

I hobbled to the fence. On the other side were farmers, baskets at their feet, throwing potato after potato. As soon as one hit the ground three or four women dived for it. If one managed to grab it, another snatched it away and still a third clawed it away from her. I wanted no part of it. It seemed strange that these farmers had come to help us at last. One of them must have caught a glimpse of our skeletal bodies and realized that what he though were only rumors spread by the enemy were true after all. Then an SS supervisor ran to the tower near us and yelled, "Shoot them! Shoot them!" The guards in the tower opened fire on the farmers who ran through the fields, leaving the baskets sitting in the dirt.

When all was quiet again, another supervisor walked up to the one who had ordered the shooting. "Why did those stupid farmers do a thing like that?" he asked.

"It's Easter," the first man replied.

The warm April lagged. We sat in the sun, hands beneath our buttocks, coats off, our legs stretched out before us like two slivers of bleached wood. Once in a while we were given a dry crust of bread, once, a half-cooked potato. Or we lay on our beds resting, almost too weak to move. I passed the time observing the other women, picturing each one as she would look with flesh on her bones, a head of hair, a lovely dress.

One morning a guard came to the barracks and told us that we were evacuating this camp also. As he turned to leave the room another guard came up to him and said, "We have to hurry! Today's the twenty-fifth. They want them by the first of May."

When they left the room Esther turned to me. "It's your birthday!" she said.

"I haven't even thought about it coming," I answered. "There isn't much to celebrate, is there?"

"Well, you are still alive," said Ellen. "That's something."

"Yes, it is," I answered.

"Listen!" Esther exclaimed. "Do you hear that? What is it?"

A rat-a-tat-tat was sounding in the far distance. It stopped and then began again.

"Those are machine guns!" I said. "The Allies must be so close that you can hear them!"

"How do you know they are the Allies?" Esther asked. "It might be the Germans."

"The Germans wouldn't shoot machine guns at their own people! No, those are Allied guns. The war will be over any day now. I know it!"

We left Burgau, walking to a station where a long train of cars,

some open at the top and some closed, was stretching for half a mile down the tracks. We were ordered to board it. "Oh, God, no!" I cried as the guards pushed us towards it. "Not another train! We are so close to being free!"

The butt of a rifle hit me hard in the back. I climbed up the steps into the open car, pulling Esther and Ellen with me. They packed the eighty of us who were left into one car and locked it. On both sides of us were other cars also filled with prisoners, all men. The doors were bolted, the interlocking of each car completed as the train began to move forward, the motion traveling down its length in a series of clicks and jolts.

Another variation of time was entered into, an expanded time. Each day, each night, stretched to the boundaries of finiteness, broke through, eased out into the vast regions of space where time circles in upon itself, cycling round and around. The train went back and forth, back and forth over the same rails. Small English planes flew not far above our open car, their machine guns pocketing the earth on both sides of us. American bombers droned high overhead, blackening the sky. We were in the very thicket of the war, caught on every side. It was the worst time of all, a time without hope. I did not think we would ever get off that train alive. The cars were opened each night to take out those who had died from despair. By the fourth day there were no more than twenty women still alive in our car.

On the fourth day, on April 29, 1945, the train pulled into a little village and stopped. I peered out of a crack in the side of the car and looked up and down the train. Three cars in front of us was the engine parked near the station of Schwabhausen. Stretching back of our car were seven or eight cars, some open at the top and some closed. Across from us was a field and beyond that, a forest. Then I saw a Red Cross truck pull into the station. In

another minute several men from the truck were coming towards us with crates of bread.

"Oh, girls!" I cried. "We're going to get some food!" The three of us were sitting by the door. I had taken off my shoes, as my toe still drained continually, and began to put them on. Whenever I had my shoes on Esther and Ellen grabbed ahold of my coat; they knew I planned to go somewhere and they did not want to be left behind. They held on to me now, one on each side. A Red Cross official came up to our car and ordered it to be unlocked. In another minute an SS guard began to slide the door open. Then, when he had pushed it open only eight or nine inches, an air raid siren in the station began to scream. It rose up high, higher, shrieking in our ears. "Why does there have to be bombing now!" I thought, so exasperated that we were not going to get food that I did not realize how close the bombing was. The SS men and Red Cross officials all ran for cover, leaving us in the locked cars. Esther and Ellen let go of me, covering their ears against the siren's wail.

Then I happened to look at the ground outside our car. There, right below me, was a chunk of bread which the Red Cross attendant must have dropped as he ran. "I'm not going to tell the girls," I decided as I eased towards the opening, "but I'm going to get that bread!" In another instant I had slid through the opening and was on the ground, reaching for the bread.

A noise suddenly came up from behind me, a monstrous roaring. I glanced quickly over my shoulder. Hundreds of English planes were flying very low, sweeping along the length of the train, their guns firing. I could clearly see the soldiers in the planes take aim at the train with their machine guns and fire at the prisoners in the open cars. Before they could shoot me I rolled beneath the train. "I have come so far!" I thought. "To die like this!"

"God forgive me!" I thought. "How could I have left her for a piece of bread?" She had been leaning against the side of the car when the bomb hit, and the car had exploded into her back. In every other bombing we had been through I had ordered: "Cover your head. Get low. Lie flat." This time I was not with her so she had remained upright, her back leaning against the metal. Ellen must have remembered my warnings; she was unharmed.

When Ellen came back with the blanket we spread it on the embankment next to the train and moved Esther to it.

"There's a bullet sticking out of her head!" Ellen cried.

"I see it," I answered, spotting a round shaft of metal protruding from the upper left side of her skull.

While she was still in shock I plucked the bullet from her head and threw it as far as I could. Next I removed the thick, long splinters of metal with my fingers. Then I took the penknife Joseph had given me and began to cut out the smaller ones. Some of them were very thin, no larger than a darning needle, and I had to cut deep. When the blood began to flow even more profusely I tore off pieces of cloth from my shirt and handed them to Ellen. "I'll cut! You wipe!" I instructed. I continued to cut and Ellen to wipe away the blood until I had removed as many splinters as I could see. We took the few shreds of my shirt that were left, wrapped Esther's back and folded the blanket around her. Rain was beginning to fall.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Suddenly I became aware again of the screams coming from the other cars, from the embankment, from the grassy slopes beside the train. I looked up. Winged skeletons with rounded skulls were drifting across the field through the falling rain, wild cries coming from the open holes of their mouths. The men prisoners who were still alive had draped blankets over their heads and were moving towards the dark forests. For a moment I was swallowed up by the eerie cries, merged with the graying sky, with the water pouring down upon me, with Esther still moaning at my feet, with the dead sprawled inside the locked cars as they fell, one on top of the other. Blood kept running from the cars, trickling over my feet and down the slope, mingling with the rain.

Then the field was empty, the ghosts vanished. I looked around, blinking rapidly as if I had just awakened from a deep sleep. Coming from the station which had not been damaged were three or four SS guards, heading towards the train.

"Come!" I said to Esther. "We must get away from the train. We'll help you."

Somehow Ellen and I pulled her up and dragged her down the embankment and across the field to a space under some pines at the edge of the forest. As we were putting her down on a bed of pine needles two of the guards caught up with us, having followed us across the field. One removed his gun from its holster. "Back to the car!" he ordered.

I looked at him, looked back at Esther, at the train still oozing

blood and decided that I had had enough. I was not going to follow one more order. "I am not going anywhere!" I said. "Here is my sister. She is terribly wounded. She cannot go back on that train with all those dead people. And I won't leave her."

"Back on the train!" he repeated, raising his gun to the height of my chest.

"You can shoot me if you want, but I won't go back."

He glared at me, raising the gun even higher, now aimed at my head. I continued to look at him, straight down the barrel. The gun began to waver, veering to the right and then to the left. Finally he lowered it and began to walk away, the second guard close behind him. When they reached the train they climbed in, the engine beginning to tow the cars full of dead into the distant fog.

When this train was gone a second train, parked directly behind our train, was noticed by some of the prisoners hiding in the forest. Several men crept towards it and broke into the cars, discovering that they were full of canned goods. "Food! Food!" they cried. They began throwing cans down to other prisoners standing at the bottom of the embankment. When one can rolled down ten men jumped on it. While they were all fighting over the can, five or six other cans were rolling by their feet.

I stared at the prisoners, at the blankets flopping from their heads as they ran to and fro from one rolling can to another, wondering how I could get some of this food. Deciding to stand where most of the cans rolled down, I edged towards the train, standing there for only a minute. Two cans rolled to my feet. I slipped them inside the front of my dress and hurried back to Ellen and Esther.

"I have two cans!" I cried. "Two whole cans!"

"What's in them?" Ellen cried. "Oh, what do you suppose it is?"

I glanced at the large, heavy cans. The printing on them was in a language I did not know; later I found out it was English. "I don't know," I answered. "I don't even know how to open a sealed can. Oh, who knows what may be inside them!"

I turned one can over and over, round and around. For five or ten minutes I struggled with the cans, trying to pierce them with my knive. All of the prepared food we ate at home and in Budapest had been in jars sealed with a lid. These metal cans were strange, lidless. As I was banging on one of them with a rock, almost smashing it entirely, a prisoner with a blanket over his head came up to me and said, "I see you have two cans."

"Yes," I answered. "But I can't open them."

"I'll tell you what," he said. "If you give me one of those cans I'll show you how to open the other one."

One open can is better than none, I thought. "Show me how to open it," I answered, giving him one can.

He plucked a metal key from the bottom of the can, stuck it on the edge of a strip near the top and began to wind up the strip. Like magic, the can was opened.

"You're a genius!" I said. "An absolute genius!"

"Thank you," he answered and drifted off down the slope, his blanket flapping behind him.

"What's in the can?" Ellen demanded. "What's in it!"

"It looks like milk!" I cried.

Slowly I raised the can to my lips and tipped it slightly. Warm,

sweet milk flowed into my mouth, eased down my throat. I gulped another mouthful and then handed it to Ellen. She held the can to her mouth, drank long and deep. Then we propped up Esther and dribbled some into her mouth, a little at a time, until she had her share. Back and forth the can went among the three of us until it was drained. Then I took out the chunk of bread I had grabbed just before the bombing started and broke it into three pieces. It was our first meal in months. I felt refreshed, renewed. All the thoughts of dying that had raced through my head as I lay beneath the exploding train vanished. I had some milk and bread in me; I wanted to live!

The question now was: where to go where patrolling SS guards would not find us? It was beginning to rain harder, the drops falling through the trees above us and splashing on our heads. In the countryside lights were coming on in farmhouses, twinkling in the gathering dusk. Ellen and I sat under the dripping trees, Esther lying between us, and watched the lights flicker there and there and there. When I saw a light come on in a house a few hundred meters away, I decided to go on another foraging expedition; the milk and bread had revived me, reminding me what it was like to eat again, and I wanted more food for us.

I began walking toward the light. As I reached the house a large collie dog ran out of the yard towards me. "What if he bites me?" I thought. Then the dog stopped a few meters away from me, looked up at my hollow face, put his tail between his hind legs and whimpered. Slowly he turned and slinked away, still whining.

I knocked on the door. An old woman opened it. "Could I please have something to eat?" I asked. She stared at me for a minute or two, looking at my face, at the raw patches on my hands, and let her eyes travel down the

blistered, loose skin on my legs, the bones now fully exposed on my feet. Her eyes moved back up again in the same, slow manner. When they reached my neck she pulled them away before she would have to look into my eyes, turned and walked away, leaving me in the open door. In another minute she returned and handed me a plate full of greasy pork bones. Without a word she turned and closed the door. I hurried back to Esther and Ellen.

"I got some bones," I said, "but they're pork."

"Pork? But how can we eat that? Won't it make us sick?" Esther asked.

"Even pork is better than nothing," I answered her. "I'm not going to worry about getting sick now. I'll worry about that later."

Ellen, seeing me chew on a bone, took one also. As we ate we broke off small slivers of meat and fed them to Esther. I cannot imagine why we did not become violently ill from eating that greasy pork, especially as we had just drunk all that milk, but we did not.

By now the sky was black and I decided that it was safe to move out from under the trees. Several hours earlier I had noticed a building near the house I had visited. In Europe the barns are often used only to shelter the animals while the hay is kept in a different building; should the hay catch fire the animals would not be harmed. The building I spotted was very likely one of these buildings used to store hay. I did not want to risk taking Esther and Ellen across the clearing while it was still light, but now the time had come. Ellen and I dragged Esther over the wet field to the building. As it faced the station we went around to the back where there was a large door, locked with a padlock. As I stood there, wondering what we would do now, I heard the rustling of hay and soft whispers drifting through the crack in the door. There must be another way in, I decided, and started around the

side of the building, feeling my way along the boards with my fingers. I came to an opening where two boards were missing and knew that this was how those inside had entered.

"I'll squeeze in first and then take Esther from you," I told Ellen as I started going inside. However, someone just inside the door quickly blocked my path. "He's probably frightened. He doesn't know who I am," I thought and began to speak to him in Yiddish. "Please let us in," I said.

"I can't," he replied, also in Yiddish. "There's no room."

"You've got to let us in!" I answered.

"There's no room, I tell you! The building is already full."

I realized that this is where all the other prisoners, the men, had gone when they disappeared. "You have to let us in," I answered. "I'm here with my sister. She's been shot. And it's raining. Now let us in!"

"Where would you go if I let you in? I mean it when I say there's no room."

"I'll find somewhere. You don't need to worry about that. Just let us in. I won't go away until you do!"

With a sigh he moved away from the opening. The three of us crawled in. The man had not been lying; everywhere Ilooked were men stretched out on the floor. At first I could not distinguish them but gradually my eyes became accustomed to the darkness and I saw the white faces, the bony skulls sticking out from the hay. Carefully we made our way over them to the far end of the barn and found an empty space next to the wall. We eased down, scattered some hay over us and leaned back against the wall. We had no bed and we were not very warm, but we were out of the train, out of the rain, out of the camps.

Then I heard footsteps on the other side of the wall. A man called

to us through a knothole, "Is anyone there?" He spoke in Hungarian and was obviously another prisoner.

"Yes," I answered, also in Hungarian.

"Where did you get in?" he asked.

"We came in through the side but I don't think you can get in, too. It's very crowded in here. A man is standing by the opening to keep any more from coming in."

"All right. I'll try to find somewhere else to spend the night."

"Wait!" I called. "Do you have any food?" After so long without food I could not get enough of it.

"No," he answered, "but I do have a bottle of whiskey. I found in a farmhouse."

"I would love to have some for my sister. She's wounded. If I put my cup next to the knothole will you fill it?"

"Certainly. Just hold it up."

I did, he filled it and then went on his way. I gave a sip to Esther, drank a little myself and handed the cup to Ellen.

"I've never had whiskey before," she said. "I don't know if I should try it."

"Try it!" I said. "It will make you feel a little better."

We passed the cup back and forth, back and forth, feeling a warmth ease down our throats, spread through our chests, melt down into our worn, haggard bodies, soothing, soothing. In a half hour we were intoxicated, at peace, sleeping the sleep of the free.

In the morning we awoke as the light was beginning to stream in through the window high above us in a rich, gold flow. It must have been the sound of

the lock on the door that woke us. A German farmer pushed the door to the side and then stood perfectly still, his outline silhouetted in the light coming from behind him. He gazed at his building, at the scattered hay, at the thin, nearly bald heads, the enormous eyes staring back at him. Without a word he turned and left, leaving the door open.

The men began to rise, stretch, limp slowly out the door one by one. Freedom was new, strange to us; we did not quite know what to do with it. The warmth of the liquor and the hay still permeated me and I was not ready to leave. When the last man had gone, closing the door behind him, the three of us still lay as we were, content. I looked out through the knothole. Snow was beginning to drift down, blowing across the field on the cold wind. "What will we do now?" I wondered. "Where will we go?"

The door suddenly burst open. A group of Vermacht soldiers from the regular German army, not the SS, came in. They had probably come to change into civilian clothes before fleeing the country. When the soldiers saw us they immediately turned to go again. Before they left, however, one man came closer, stretching out his hand to us holding a package of food. I took it from him. Inside were three crackers, one for each of us, a hunk of cheddar cheese and a chocolate bar--a feast! We ate and then sat back again, still not sure of where to go.

As I looked out of the peephole again I saw smoke coming from a single cattle car parked on a track near the station. Some of the men who had been with us were climbing into the car, evidently joining others who had built a fire. "That's where we'll go," I said to the girls. "It will be warmer there."

We pulled Esther along. She was becoming delerious as infection set into the wounds. Soon after we reached this car several of the men remembered

that the train parked on the side rail had food. They began to climb on it once more, ransacking the cars. As I also started for this train, still ravenous with hunger, Esther grabbed one arm and Ellen the other.

"Let me go!" I cried. "There's more food in the cars!"

"No! No! No! No!" Esther cried and held firm with a strength I could not believe she still possessed.

"Ellen, can't you help me?" I asked. "You know I'll be right back."

She shook her head, no. As I was still struggling to break free an explosion shattered the quiet morning air, throwing us to our feet. I looked up to see the food train blown into fragments, not a trace left of the men who had been on it. The SS had placed a bomb on the train and it detonated when someone stepped on it.

We climbed into the single cattle car on the other tracks and held out our hands to the small fire burning at one end. I did not want to stay; a bomb might have been planted in this car as well. Esther was moaning, becoming almost unconscious. I desperately wanted someplace where she could lie down. Then one of the men said, "There's a small barracks on the other side of the tracks where railroad workers lived. Why don't you take her there? I think another woman is already in it."

When we opened the door to this barrack a Hungarian girl from our camp, Sonia, greeted us. "Seren! Come in!" she said. "There are beds here and a stove--and even running water. I discovered this place just a few minutes ago."

"But can we stay here?" Ellen asked. "Will they let us?"

"We will commandeer it," I answered. "It's ours."

While Sonia made a wood fire in the pot belly stove Ellen and I put

sther on one of the hard beds. We unwrapped the strips of cloth from her back, now no more than one massive, swelling wound, pus draining everywhere. The bullet hole in her head was equally enflamed and sore, her forehead hot and sweaty. I took off her strips of clothes and sponged her back with soap and water, washed her clothes and draped them around the stove to dry. We stayed in the barracks the rest of the day and through the night.

By the next morning Esther was running a high fever. I did not know what to do; we had no medicine, no way to remove the slivers of metal festering inside her. Then, at mid-morning, on the first day of May, a white truck drove up to the barracks. Two men in white coats came to the door and knocked. As they did not appear to be Germans we let them in. They began speaking to us in a language we did not understand, beckoning us to follow them to the truck.

"Absolutely not!" I told them in Yiddish. "We're not leaving here with someone we don't know."

The men left. "I wonder who they were?" I thought as the truck drove away. They came back in only a few minutes accompanied by a third man. This new man came immediately to the door and yelled in Yiddish, "Open up, please. We're American soldiers. We've come to take you to a hospital."

I opened the door. "What took you so long?" I asked.

We rode for about fifty kilometers until we came to a convent, Saint Ottilien, which had been converted into a hospital. As soon as the truck stopped in front of a large tent, the back door was opened and nuns in long black gowns and headpieces came rushing. They held out their arms to us as we crawled out of the truck and led us to the front of the tent. Here a nun undressed us, throwing our rags into a burning pile. When the nun came to

Esther and removed her dress she glanced quickly at her back and cried, "God in heaven!"

Immediately she wrapped a sheet around Esther and ordered two men to bring a stretcher. In an instant she was being carried away. "Esther!" I cried. I wanted to follow here. But then I thought, "These nuns are very kind. They will be good to her and give her the care she needs."

Several other nuns took Sonia, Ellen and me into a tent where there were women from other trains. We were bathed and disinfected, our heads shaved to rid them of lice, and each given a clean pair of men's pajamas and straw slippers. Finally we were put on a scale to be weighed. I weighed forty-four pounds, including pajamas.

"Now, follow me, please." an older nun said and began walking into the convent.

I was exhausted and sat down on the ground. Was the war over? It seemed to be, but I was not sure. I was too tired to care, more tired than I had ever been in my life. I closed my eyes.

Then I felt myself being lifted up in two arms. I opened my eyes. One of the American solders was carrying me. I closed my eyes again. Drops of water began splashing on my cheeks and running down my neck. "Is it raining again?" I thought. "No, we're inside now where it would not rain." Then I realized that the soldier carrying me was crying, his tears falling on my face.

He carried me into a large assembly hall where rows of beds were sitting in lines. Gently he lowered me onto clean, white sheets smelling of soap and starch, onto a soft, soft mattress and covered me with a warm blanket. "Oh, my God! I've died and gone to heaven," I thought. "Why didn't I want to die all this time? It's so wonderful in heaven. . . . "

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

When I awoke it was evening and a nun was leaning over my bed, her full, round face framed in stiff cotton. She was looking at me through her oval spectacles and asking, "Can I get you anything? Is there anything you would like?"

I could not think of anything I wanted other than to be left exactly as I was, lying among white clouds, drifting. I closed my eyes and the nun moved away, her black habit swishing through the aisles.

The next time I awoke morning light was streaming in through the high windows of the convent, filtering through stained glass, falling in deep shades of indigo and violet on the rows of white beds, on the small hills and valleys of our bodies. "It is like the chapel in Valea Uzului," I thought, remembering how the colored light came in through the windows, how the tall grass whispered in the wind beside the spring. Letting myself sink into the grass, I listened to the murmur of the water.

"Can I get you something now?" a voice was asking again from far away. "Couldn't I get you something to eat?"

With a great effort I opened my eyes. The nun was leaning over my bed. "Yes," I whispered. "I would like some creamed wheat."

"You would like a bowl of cereal?"

"Creamed wheat . . . " I repeated.

"Of course," she answered. "I'll bring it to you right away."

After a few minutes she returned, carrying a steaming bowl of the cereal. "Would you like me to feed it to you?" she asked.

I shook my head, no; I was too tired to eat.

"I'll set it here on the table beside you. Whenever you want to you can have some." She smiled, pulled the blanket up over my shoulders and went to the next bed. "Why did I ask for that?" I wondered. "I don't like it at all . . . "

I am very small, four or five years old and quite ill with measles. The mill doctor has ordered me to remain in my darkened bedroom for three weeks. My legs are weak, my body like jelly. I hurt so. Mama comes into the dim room with a big bowl of creamed wheat, smiling, sitting down on the bed next to me. She holds a spoonful next to my mouth. When I swallow it she says, "What a good little girl! You will get better in no time if you eat the whole bowlful."

"Why do I have to be sick all of the time?" I ask. "This afternoon Rose and Berta are going on a picnic with Herman and Tamara and I have to stay here in this bed."

"Never you mind them," she answers. "I'll stay here with you. Next time I'll even put a sweet surprise in the cereal."

Where was Ellen? Where was she? I opened my eyes, looking quickly over to the bed on my right. A strange woman stared back at me. I looked to the left. Ellen was there, sound asleep. I closed my eyes again, listening to the muted sounds of the nuns going from bed to bed. Most of the women, like I, asked for a particular food--an orange, a poached egg, a cup of tea. Everyone taken into the convent had been put into bed. Some of the prisoners were

still fairly healthy, having recently come from camps where they were fed; some were barely alive. The process of examining us one by one had already begun, those healthy enough to be released referred to a distribution center.

From time to time as I lay there I would struggle up from sleep as if ascending through fathoms of water, finally breaking through to the surface. Opening my eyes I gazed across the aisle at the women in the beds facing me. Several of these women were additional survivors of Auschwitz. These women were of the same nature as those who had been in the locked cars with us, having learned to survive by becoming as merciless and ruthless as the SS guards who kept them imprisoned. They now sat up in their beds, alert, demanding.

Next to these Polish women were three sisters who were also fairly healthy and were passing the time calling back and forth to each other in Hungarian.

"Edith," one said the first morning, "the nun is coming back. Will you ask her this time?"

"Yes, sister dear. I'll ask," the woman next to her replied.

When the nun approached Edith's bed, inquiring if she would bring her anything, Edith answered, "Could you bring each of us a rosary? We would like that more than anything!"

"Have you converted then?" asked the nun.

"Oh, yes, before the war. A priest gave each of us a rosary then but they were taken away from us when we entered the camp."

"I hope the women from Auschwitz don't find out about this," I thought.

In a few minutes the nun returned, carrying three beaded chains, a small black cross dangling from each one. "Here you are," she said, handing them to the sisters.

"Hail Mary, full of grace . . . " the three began chanting in unison, their hands clasped around the beads.

"Look!" a Polish woman yelled in Yiddish. "Do you see what those bitches are doing? They've got a cross in their hands!"

"I see! I see!" another from Auschwitz yelled. "Can you believe it? They should be thrown out of here!"

"You bastards!" the first woman yelled at them. "Get out of here. We don't want you. Get out!"

The three sisters kept chanting, unaware of the insults that were being hurled at them in a language they did not understand. This indifference seemed to anger the Polish women even more. The uproar increased, the Polish women shouting so loud that three or four nuns came running. The three sisters were taken out of the room immediately, still clasping the rosaries in their hands.

Several hours later, towards noon, a nun came through the aisles and announced, "In a little while we're going to bring in dinner. I want all of you to stay in your beds. We'll come around and give each of you your meal from the pushcarts." As she continued on down the aisles, repeating her announcement, I saw how the women began to sit up, to wait anxiously. For many of us this would be the first meal in years given to us gracefully, one human being serving another as if both were equal, deserving of consideration.

When the carts began to rumble from the far end of the room, the wheels to move closer and closer, the women crouched on the edge of their beds like cats, low to the ground, stretched flat, ready for the rush. As soon as the carts were a few meters from our beds many of the women jumped, pushing the nuns aside, fell on the food, thrusting their hands into the bowls, licking their fingers clean and quickly grabbing more.

"Stop! Stop! Please! You're making such a mess!" a nun kept yelling but the women would not, could not stop. The smells of steaming cabbage dripping with butter, of hot savory beef, forced them on. If I had been able to get out of bed I would have been with them.

When every scrap of cabbage, meat and pudding was gone, some of the women began to carry the bowls back to their beds, licking them clean, their long tongues swirling over and over the surfaces. Finally a nun cautiously approached the empty cart and went from bed to bed, collecting the bowls, clucking her tongue repeatedly. Later in the afternoon the same nun, an older, rounded woman, came back and said very calmly and slowly, as if she were speaking to children, "We're going to be bringing you supper on carts soon. Please, please stay in your beds this time. There is plenty of food. If the cart becomes empty I'll take it back to the kitchen for more. You must believe me when I say that we have more than enough food. Remember now, stay in your beds." She left, confident that this time we understood her.

When the carts again began to rumble in the distance the women poised themselves as before, jumped, sprang on the food. Again I remained in bed, too exhausted to even raise my arm. Ellen, beside me, slept on, as tired as I. Even as the women were still stuffing food into their mouths, I fell back into darkness.

This time I went deeper into the sea of sleep, sinking down, down, the voices of the women becoming fainter, far away. The water hung azure, deep green above me, roaring faintly like the drone of a distant stream. At times I found myself adrift on the surface again and opened my eyes. There on the table beside me would be another bowl of creamed wheat, sitting beside the other bowls. I would not let the nun take any of them away. Once six bowls swam before me all in a row, gliding deep, down, to the bottom.

It is cold, cold. We have been working all afternoon on the ship, carrying crates of vegetables down the ramp to the cellar. The SS finally orders us to stop working and line up for the walk back to camp. As we are standing in our rows the guard suddenly struts to the front of the line and yells out, "Numbers 85803 and 85801, step forward!"

"Those are Esther and my numbers!" I realize with a jolt. "Why are they singling out us? Have they discovered that we are sisters?"

As we leave the line, carefully avoiding looking at each other, the guard orders us to follow her to the SS Headquarters. Several times I have seen women being carried out of the office, broken, dead.

Three SS supervisors stare at us. After a long, quiet moment one of them says in German, "They don't look like sisters."

"No, they don't," another replies. "But we can't rely on appearances. We'll have to question them separately." She points to me. "You, Number 85803, go outside and wait."

I begin walking towards the door. Esther will be alone with them! If I try to stay with her they will be sure that we are sisters and send one of us to a different camp. If I leave her alone she may be hurt. The door closes. I pick up a broom sitting outside and begin to sweep, keeping as close to the door as possible.

Long minutes pass. I hear nothing except the quiet swish of the broom on the worn boards. Then a harsh voice shouts, "I asked you a question! Answer me! What is the name of your mother?"

Silence hangs in the cold air.

"Then tell me the name of your father," the voice continues. "You do have a father, don't you? Or are you a bastard like all the others? Answer! Answer!"

Esther's sobbing, halting voice drifts out to me. "My father was named . . . named . . . Her . . . Herman . . . "

"And your mother?"

"Ta . . . Tamara . . . "

"How many brothers?"

Silence.

"How many?" The sound of a fierce slap resounds through the air. I sweep faster, wanting to run in, throw myself in front of Esther. She was giving all the wrong answers, confusing our half-brother Herman and his wife with our mother and father.

"I . . . I . . . there were two--no, three brothers . . . " Esther finally says.

"She's an idiot!" one of the SS women shouts. "We'll get nowhere with her! Take her out and bring in the other one."

Quickly I replace the broom and stand at the far end of the porch. The door opens. Esther stumbles out, tears running down her face. A large red mark spreads across one cheek. Passing by her quickly I go into the office.

I stand before the three supervisors. One of them is the short, quick SS woman who often walks beside me as we go to work. When I glance at her she turns to the supervisor standing next to her and whispers, "Watch out for this one. She's shrewd. She never cries."

She turns to me. "What is your name?" she demands.

"Seren Tuvel," I answer.

"Your father's name?"

"Abraham Tuvel."

"How many brothers and sisters?"

"I have five brothers and four sisters still living."

"Which sister is in this camp with you?"

"I have no sister here."

"One of our men was on the ship this morning supervising the unloading. He recognized you as someone he used to know. He also recognized your sister. Do you mean to tell me that he was lying?"

A man in an SS uniform is watching me. He comes closer. I see that he is someone I went to school with in Fúleháza. He takes out a notebook and begins writing in it. Then he gives it to my priest teacher from Fúleháza who walks up to the three supervisors and hands it to them. He stands to one side, smiling.

"Well?" the SS woman demands.

"I did not say that the man was lying," I answer. "I have not accused him of anything. When he knew me long ago in Fúleháza there were six girls in our family. It's true that one of these six was with me. However, she died on the march through Hungary."

"You're lying!" a second SS woman shouts.

"No, I'm telling the truth. She died last summer."

"You rotten bitch! You're a filthy liar. Admit it!"

I surprise myself. I am not frightened. Saying no more, I continue to look the SS supervisor in the eye.

"Get out, you miserable dog!" the short woman who knows me yells.

I go outside. An empty wasteland stretches before me. Esther is nowhere in sight. My heart begins to charge against my ribs. "They have taken Esther away. I know it!" I decide. "They kept me just long enough to take her to the crematorium!"

I begin walking on my wooden clogs towards a tall, smoking chimney in the distance. Snow collects on my shoes. I become higher, higher. "Esther . . . " I call looking out into the whiteness swirling all around me. "Esther . . . Esther . . . "

"What is it? What's wrong?" a voice answered.

My eyes popped open. The older, rounded nun, Sister Maria, was leaning over me once more. "Is it cereal? Do you want more cereal?" she asked.

"Was I screaming?" I whispered.

"No, you were whispering a name over and over. I was passing by and I saw you turn about so on the bed that I thought you might need something. Then I heard the name."

"My sister!" I said. "I can't find her!" I looked quickly at the bed next to me. Ellen was still there but Esther was nowhere. I had to find her. "I have to see my sister!" I said.

"All right. We'll have someone take you to her. I'll be back in just a minute with an orderly."

When the orderly came he wrapped the blanket around me, picked me up in his arms and carried me into a smaller room off the main hall. "There she is," he said in a deep, kind voice. "See, she's all bandaged up."

"Esther?" I called. "Esther, is that you?" The woman in the bed was lying with her face away from me, her entire body swathed in bandages.

"She's had several operations," the orderly said, "but she'll be just fine."

"But it doesn't look like her," I said.

"We'll just have to move a little closer then," he answered, carrying me to the other side of the bed. Then I saw it--the thin, white face of Esther

lying on the pillow, breathing quietly, eyes closed, mouth slack, one bandaged hand drawn up near her cheek.

"Well, is it your sister?" the orderly asked.

"Yes," I sighed. Leaning my head against his shoulder I fell again into whiteness, into the silent sea.

For the next few days I drifted in and out of consciousness. The bed became even softer, more soft than I thought possible and I thought again that perhaps I was in heaven after all where everything was as fine goose down. Then the nun, changing my sheets one day, whispered, "We've put a comforter under you, my dear. It will help your skin heal."

Another time when I awoke briefly and opened my eyes I saw that I was bandaged almost as much as Esther, the white cloths winding all around my arms to the top of my fingers, down my legs and over my toes. Every morning a sharp pain speared me in the right shoulder. Gradually I realized that I was being given injections. Often I woke up to find myself being pushed through the corridor and tried desperately to stay awake long enough to see where they were taking me, but always failed, sinking again into unconsciousness.

One morning, however, I succeeded in remaining alert and saw that I was being taken into a room full of machines. Milling about the room were many men, all speaking high German. Then my eyes fell shut again and I could not open them. The next thing I knew I was back in my bed and it was late afternoon. All of the other women were gone somewhere. "That room!" I thought. "It was full of Germans. We're back in camp! They took us back when I was unconscious, the nuns as well. They mean to kill all of us with those machines. We'll have to get out of here."

"Ellen," I called. "Ellen! Listen to me!"

"Seren? What is it?" she answered sleepily. She was also bandaged and conscious sporadically.

"We're back in camp! I'm sure of it! They all speak high German. Tonight when it's dark I'm getting out of here. Will you come with me? We'll get help and come back for Esther."

"If you want me to," she answered. "I've saved up some bread. We can take it with us."

"Good girl! We're on the second floor but I think we can climb out the window and jump down."

"All right. Wake me when it's time to go."

When night came it seemed to take forever for the women to all lie still, quiet, breathing evenly. Finally when the last one was asleep and the nuns had turned off the lights and left I slowly began to climb out of bed. As soon as I managed to sit upright, placing my feet on the floor, a wave of dizziness washed over me, washed me down, down. "No!" I thought. "I can't faint. We'll be killed in a few more days if we don't leave." I shook my head slightly, stood up and walked to Ellen's bed.

"Ellen, wake up!" I whispered. "It's time."

She stared at me, wild-eyed.

"Remember?" I asked. "We're back in camp. We have to leave."

"Oh . . . yes. I wrapped the bread in a towel," she said, getting out of bed.

"You go first. I'll be right behind you," I whispered.

Inch by inch we shuffled across the room to the window. As we were trying to pull it up, Sister Maria was somehow right behind us. "No, no, no, no, no," she clucked. "You must not be out of bed like this. Come now. Back to bed with you. Here, lean on my shoulders."

She put one ample arm around Ellen and the other around me. We shambled back to our beds. As soon as I lay down again I was asleep, even before I could plan our next escape attempt.

When I awoke I was in a different room, one with bars on the windows. "They put us in a cell so we can't escape," I decided. Tears sprang to my eyes. "Ellen! Where's Ellen?" I thought. Then I saw her in the next bed. A wave of heat flashed over me, and then another. My head became thick, hot, melting into the pillow. Sweat poured from my forehead into my eyes, down my neck. Oh, it was too hot, too hot. Red-hot, blood-hot, the water burning, sinking over me . . .

When I awoke again a delicious coolness was spreading across my forehead, easing into my consciousness. I opened my eyes to Sister Maria again, sitting beside my bed.

"Ah, you are awake!" she said. "Is the cloth on your head too cold? Shall I remove it?"

I moved my head slightly.

"You have been very sick," she continued. "Did you know that you had typhoid fever? We had to move you and your friend to isolation. We didn't want you to contaminate the others."

"Have I been in this room long?" I whispered.

"Yes--about four weeks. It's almost the end of May. You aren't thinking of running away from us again, are you?" She smiled, smoothing a fresh cloth across my forehead. "Please don't be afraid of us," she continued. "We want you to get well and then you can leave. Doesn't that sound like a better idea? Of course, it does! You know I never thought I'd be a nurse but

one day at the beginning of the war Hitler sent one of his SS men here. He told us that we had two choices: go to a camp or remain at the convent as nurses. Of course, we all chose to stay here. So you see I enjoy taking care of you. I could have been you in that camp. The least I can do is help you get better. Do you understand?"

"Yes . . . but I heard German voices one day. I thought . . . " I couldn't finish the sentence; it took too much effort.

"You thought you had good reason to be frightened. Is that it? Of course! I should have known. Those voices belonged to wounded soldiers from the Vermacht. We are caring for them as well in another wing of the hospital. They won't hurt you. When they're recovered they'll leave, too. Would you like anything to eat? It's a little past suppertime but I can get you some fruit or a nice bowl of pudding."

"Just some water. I'm so thirsty."

"Of course. I have some ice water right here, good and cold!"

Sister Maria talked with me half the night before I slipped back into sleep. When I awoke again I realized that Ellen was no longer in the bed beside me. I was in a room by myself.

"Ellen!" I tried to shout. It came out as a whisper.

"What is it?" Sister Maria said, appearing out of nowhere.

I decided that this nun was not to be trusted after all; if Ellen had been taken back to camp I would soon follow. I said nothing.

"You wonder where your friend went, don't you?" she said. "I should have told you. She developed hearing difficulties after she came down with typhoid fever. We sent her to another hospital for an operation on her ears. They have some good doctors there--ear specialists. She will be just fine."

"I am alone . . . " I thought, closing my eyes. "After all this time I am alone . . . " Sister Maria was chattering on but I could not distinguish the words. A great weight was settling on my chest, pulling me back under the sea, under the heavy, black water.

The next time I awoke it was the middle of June. After the typhoid fever abated, pneumonia had set in. Despite these illnesses, however, my body began to heal itself. The nuns faithfully took care of me, attending to me day and night, ever kind. One morning Sister Maria bustled up to my bed and announced, "We're going to take your bandages off today. Isn't that wonderful!" Slowly she and another nun unwound my right arm. The pink fingernails appeared first, white crescent moons shining at the bottoms, then the first and second joints, pale, whole, the bone covered, the knuckles wrinkled with new skin, the back of my hand, the wrist. Still unwinding they reached my forearm. Oh, it had flesh! The upper arm as well! Holding it out in front of me I gazed at the tender, soft skin, at the fine hairs curling as if I were newborn, a baby discovering her arm. When my other arm was uncovered it, too, was smooth, firm. And my legs! Was there fat on the thigh? There was! I could not believe it, lifting first one leg and then the other, wiggling my toes back and forth. Even my sore toe was healed, the missing part barely noticeable.

"How well you've healed!" Sister Maria was saying.

"Do you have a mirror?" I asked, suddenly remembering that I had a face, too.

"Yes, we do," the other nun answered. "I'll get one for you."

Returning, she held the mirror in front of me. I glanced at it and quickly turned away. "You can take it back," I said.

"Oh, child, you will blossom again," Sister Maria said. "The face takes longer to heal than the body. The suffering is still there--lodged in the lines and furrows. But they will fade. You'll be lovely again. I can't wait to see how beautiful you'll become."

"You may have to wait a long time," I answered.

"I'll wait! In another week or two you should be well enough to go outside and sit in our garden. You'll see all the spring flowers."

Every day after that I felt somewhat better than the day before. One afternoon as I was lying in bed, back in the large assembly hall again, Esther walked into the room for the first time. She came in hesitantly, her head still bandaged in white cloths wound completely around the back and top of her head, leaving only her pale face exposed. She had not regained all of the weight lost during the long months without food, her tall body no more than a long, slight line in the white pajamas.

"Esther!" I laughed as she reached my bed. "You look so funny."

"I do?" she answered.

"You look like a walking stick with a head!" I said, reaching out my hand to hers. "Oh, but I'm glad to see you again. It's been so long."

She sat down on the bed beside me and began to stroke my cheek with her fingertips. Tears slid from her eyes and plopped on the pillow beside me. "I didn't know if we were going to make it," she said then. "I wouldn't have if it hadn't been for you."

"Do you think I could have survived alone?" I asked. "Never! I needed you and Ellen as much as you needed me!"

We gazed into each other's eyes for a long time, unable to quench the

thirst for the sight of each other. Finally Esther asked, "Where's Ellen?"

"She's been sent to another hospital. She had to have special treatment for her ears."

"Will we ever see her again?"

"I'm sure of it," I answered.

We sat quietly then, Esther smoothing the hair away from my forehead with her hands. When a large group of doctors and uniformed men suddenly came swinging through the doors of the hall and began walking down the aisles, we barely noticed them. Groups of people visited the hospital now and then to see if we were being given good care and recovering. Some of the Jewish prisoners, however, were either too ill to recover or died from putting more food into themselves than their emaciated bodies could digest during the first few days.

This particular group of visitors seemed to take a special interest in us. The nuns were fluttering after them like a flock of chattering blackbirds. Sister Maria flew to my bedside, her face flushed, hands up in the air. "It's General Eisenhower!" she said. "He's brought his whole entourage! I knew they were coming to visit us sometime but I didn't know it would be today." She stood beside my bed, hugging her round body with her arms and rocking slightly back and forth, watching Eisenhower walk down the aisle.

When Eisenhower's group reached the middle of the room they stopped and looked around. The doctors began pointing to various patients, speaking about their conditions in the language I now recognized as English. Then a doctor gestured in my direction. Immediately Eisenhower began walking briskly towards me, all the other men following closely behind. At the foot of my bed he stopped abruptly, his face turning red and anger and stared at Esther. Not at

all interested in the commotion, she was continuing to caress my face with her hand, trailing her fingers lightly over my forehead and down the side of my cheek.

Eisenhower barked a few words in English to the man standing next to him. Esther, looking up when she heard the harsh tone of voice, jumped slightly. Then the man standing next to Eisenhower, evidently his interpretor, pointed a finger at Esther and said loudly in German, "You! Tommie! Get out!"

Esther stood up slowly. "You want me to leave?" she asked. "This is my sister," she said, addressing one of the German doctors. "We haven't seen each other since we arrived at the hospital."

"I know," he answered, "but General Eisenhower thinks you're a man. I'll tell him who you are."

The doctor spoke to the interpretor and the interpretor to Eisenhower. He, in turn, glanced at me again, looked me in the eyes and said something in English. Then he turned and marched out of the room, the nuns still flapping along behind him.

"Tommie!" I said, clasping Esther's hand. "Do you like your new name?"

"Why did he call me that?" Esther asked.

"It must be a nickname for a soldier in the United States," I answered. "He thought you were a man come to court me. As if one would!" I laughed.

"Well, I guess he can't see very well then," she answered, "even if he is a general."

"Tommie!" I said again. "I like it!"

Gradually I began getting up and walking slowly around, holding on to the side of the bed with one hand. My legs and feet still had no sensation in them and I felt as if I were walking on two sticks of wood. Then one day

in the middle of June, Sister Maria came up to my bed with a wheelchair. "It's a beautiful day!" she said. "Would you like to go outside and sit in the garden for a while? The sun is warm. The flowers are all in bloom."

"I would love to!" I answered.

"Good! Just climb into this and off we'll go."

She whirled me down the aisle and out into the bright light falling in white swaths on the green sea of grass, on the oak trees, on the daisies and irises curving along the sidewalks in shades of lavender and yellow. We stopped under a large shade tree.

"Summer has come while I've been asleep," I said. "I've missed the spring . . . "

"You'll catch up!" Sister Maria answered. "I'll leave you here for a little while. I must see to some other patients. Smell the flowers for me," she called as she walked back towards the hospital.

For a half hour or so I looked at the bunches of billowy clouds sweeping across the great span of blue, at the masses of daisies swaying as a breeze swept over them in waves. Other solitary women sat here and there on the wide expanse of lawn--frail bits of flesh stuck in metal chairs while around us the world swelled and dipped in glorious undulations.

"I don't have to stay in this chair," I decided then and stood up. I began to walk, creeping along over the grass, one foot slowly brought up to meet the other as if I were still in Ravensbrück, my legs two wooden logs. After a few minutes I stopped and turned around to see how far I had gone. The chair sat like a tiny spot so very far away, seemingly miles away. "How can I have gone that far?" I thought, sinking onto the grass. I looked at the chair again. "Oh, it's not that far," I realized. "It's only about six meters

from here." I got up again and began moving towards the chair, looking down at the ground so that I would not stumble over a hidden rock, and then looking up again. The chair was not closer!

After an eternity of time had passed, minute by long minute, the sun on my face still, hot, indifferent, I was near enough to the chair to reach out and grab the sides. Cautiously, lest I tip it over, I reached for them, half-turned and lowered myself into the seat. "I have a long way to go," I thought, "a very long way."

Several days later the nuns began doing exercises with me. The prolonged exposure to cold weather, the daily freezings, had reduced the circulation in my legs. Every morning I sat with my feet raised for half an hour and then stood up until the stinging needles of pain shot out of my legs, one by one.

As I was hobbling around my bed one morning, gritting my teeth until the last needle was gone, I heard someone walk towards me and stop a few feet away from the bottom of the bed.

"Sereń?" a voice asked.

I opened my eyes. "Joseph! You've come back!"

"I promised you I would."

He held out his arms. I fell into them, resting my head against his chest for a moment, his shoulders and head reaching up above me, arms wound around my back. When I pulled away I looked at him without saying anything, gazed at his face, at the deep crinkles around his dark, laughing eyes. I could not believe that this nephew of mine, this child of an older half-brother who never paid much attention to me, would seek me out over and over.

Finally I asked, "Why me, Joseph? Why do you always try to find me again?"

"Didn't you know?" he answered.

"What?"

"You're my favorite aunt?"

"I am?"

"You always have been."

"But I am so much older than you. Esther is more your age. I wasn't home anymore when you came to visit our house."

"You don't believe me? Well, I have proof!" He took what looked to be a tattered photograph from his pocket and handed it to me. For an instant I stared at the young girl smiling back at me, happy, full of health. I wondered who she was. Then I realized that I was the girl. The photograph was the one taken by Eugene just before Esther and Emma left Reghinal-Sasesc for Budapest to work in the lingerie factory. It had been creased into thirds, the images of Esther on the left and Emma on the right folded over me in the middle; while the two outer thirds were soiled and cracked the middle section was smooth, clean.

"Where did you get this?" I asked.

"I carried it with me on the inside of my shoe. No one ever found it."

"You had it all during the war?"

"Yes. I knew that you, of all people, would survive. Now I want to give it to you."

The black and white image swam before my eyes. Again I heard Eugene's voice ordering, "Attention! You must pay attention or I'll never get this picture taken!"; remembered how Rose and my mother had stood together, hand in hand to one side of him, wanting the moment when their daughters would separate, leave them, never to come.

"Have you found out anything, Joseph?" I asked. "Have you seen anyone else from home?"

He looked down at the floor. We were now sitting on the edge of the bed, my hand in his. "No . . . " he answered softly. "I was with Rose's husband, Eugene, and also with Louise's husband in the labor camp. The three of us were taken to Auschwitz together and put in a work detail. But when they began evacuating the camp we were separated. I was went to Turkheim where I saw you. I don't know where Eugene and Bela were sent."

"What about my mother? Was she still well when you left Reghinal-Sasesc?"

"Yes . . . but I heard that they cordoned off a section of the outskirts of town and put all the Jewish people in it after I left."

"I know," I answered. "I found out when Esther and I were in Budapest. We tried to send for her but by then all Jews were forbidden to travel."

"I'm going home!" Joseph said, "Mother and Father may be there waiting for me. Many Jews were put in work details at Auschwitz. We were fed well. Look at me!"

"Joseph . . . " I said, grabbing his hand tighter and looking into his eyes, "they may be all right. But please don't get your hopes up too high. So many died in the locked cars. So terribly many."

"I know. But I have to hope, don't I? I'm going to start looking for them and my two brothers as soon as I leave here. I was in a hospital, too, but I've been released and I'm going home."

"Where will you go--to Reghinal-Sasesc or to Valea Uzului?"

"To both."

"Joseph, if you find anyone, anyone, will you let me know?"

"Of course. There are so many of us. Some of us will have survived. I know it! Remember all of your mother's brothers? Remember Uncle Louie?"

"Uncle Louie! How could I forget him? Whenever he needed money he came to work at the mill. Father could barely tolerate him. Every time we all went to Temple he stood in the door and laughed at us. Father was always afraid he would be a bad influence on all my brothers. If Uncle Louie hadn't been Mama's brother Father would have told him to leave and never come back."

"Well, I have to leave pretty soon," Joseph said then, "I want to see Esther and then I'll go."

"Wait, Joseph! How did you find me? You never said."

"Through the central office in Munich. The Jewish Council there has a list of all the survivors and where they can be located. Your name and Esther's name were on the list. The convent must have sent them."

"But no one else's name?"

"No one else's . . . I'm sure they don't have all the names. The war has been over for only two months. Everything takes time."

"Yes . . . Thank you for coming, Joseph. It means so much to see someone from my family."

"You're welcome, my favorite aunt. I'll see you again. Don't worry."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

In the beginning of July, three months after I had entered the convent hospital, I was well enough to be transferred to a distribution center at Feldafing, Bavaria. Esther was still too ill to travel; I did not like leaving her but the nuns assured me that I could come back and visit her as often as I desired. When she was better she would be sent to Feldafing as well.

Early one morning a Red Cross leader accompanied me and the other men and women who had recovered to Feldafing. Still wearing our pajamas, we boarded Red Cross busses, feeling as if we were out in public in our underwear. The nuns assured us, however, that we would be given clothes when we reached the center, courtesy of the American people. As we pulled out of the hospital I saw only Sister Maria waving, her whole arm slowly moving up and down, up and down, the robe flapping like the wing of a great bird. I would never forget her kindnesses.

When we arrived at the center, a former Hitler Youth Camp, we were driven directly to the main office to be registered. As I descended the steps from the bus I heard someone call my name. "Sereń! Here! Sereń." I looked up. There was Ellen standing directly in front of the office, her face radiant.

"Ellen!" I cried, hugging her close. "How did you know I was coming?"

"I waited here every day since I arrived. I knew you would get off that bus one day. And now you have! Oh, Sereń, I've missed you so. It's wonderful to have you back! And you know what? We have dormitories here with bunkbeds. I have a lower bunk and I saved the upper one for you. I remembered how you always said, 'Up we go! Up we go!'"

"You learned, didn't you?" I laughed. "Esther, too. On the way over here I decided to look at the hospital here. If I think it's good I'm going to ask if Esther can be sent, too."

Ellen and I went to our dormitory, a large, modern building with clean showers and toilets, a spacious dining hall with a long table where we ate our meals and a room full of bunkbeds. There were twenty women in our dormitory. The center was very well organized, I soon realized. A number of the men prisoners had come from an area located near the border of Poland and Lithuania that was known for its well-educated, intelligent Jewish people. These men had chosen leaders responsible for requesting food from the kitchens and bringing it to the dining rooms.

The next morning I visited the hospital at Feldafing and, becoming satisfied that Esther would receive good care there, asked the central office if they would transfer her. I wanted her close; the electric trains were so erratic, stopping sometimes for hours when the current was shut off, that I did not want to rely on them to enable me to visit her. Three days later Esther arrived and was put in the hospital. The three of us were together once more.

As the weeks passed I began to grow restless. Every day I looked at the large bulletin board in the office to see if my name was listed among those who had received mail; I received no letters, not one. Every day I waited at the station for the trains to come in, thinking, "One of these days either Samuel or someone from my family will come. I cannot believe that only Esther, Joseph and I survived. There are my brothers, my sisters, my mother, my aunts and uncles, all the children . . . someday one of them will come and find me."

On a hot afternoon in the middle of July I sat on the bench in front of the station, watching the passengers descend the steps from the train. Suddenly a tall, dark-haired man caught my attention. "I know this man," I realized instantly, my heart jumping. "He's someone from my family! But who? No one in my family ever dressed like this!" On his head the man wore a large, round, black hat like those of the Hasidic Jews. A long, black beard flowed down the length of his chest, ruffling slightly in the warm breeze blowing in from the south, spilled over the black cassock reaching to his white socks and tall, black boots. He came closer and smiled, his white teeth dazzling against the dark beard and moustache.

"My God! It's Uncle Louie!" I realized. Immediately I held out my arms to my mother's youngest brother, rushing to embrace him.

"No! No!" he shouted, holding me back with an outstretched hand.

I stopped short. "Uncle Louie!" I cried. "It's me, Sereń!"

"Yes, my child. I know. But you must not touch me. It is forbidden." Only ten years older than I, he stood like a patriarch just come down from the mountain, the voice of God ringing in his ears.

"I don't understand . . . " I stammered.

"I'll explain, my child."

Uncle Louie escorted me back to the dormitory and sat down to tell me his story. Like Joseph, he had been at Auschwitz until it was evacuated. As they were leaving the camp an SS guard gave him a suitcase to hold and they began the long, killing march through the frozen countryside. The weather was severe, the snow ceaseless; many of the prisoners fell down in the drifts and died or became lost in the blinding winds. Either the SS man was also lost or forgot to whom he had given the suitcase; Uncle Louie was left with it.

After the Liberation he was sent to Salzburg, Austria, still carrying the suitcase. When he finally opened it he discovered that it contained valuable jewelry--gold chains, diamond brooches, emerald rings--all stolen from the inmates of the concentration camps. He stored it away and declared himself to be a Hasidic rabbi, he who had never entered a Temple before the war. Then he set out to find the surviving members of his family. Seeing Esther's and my names on the list from Feldafing, he came to us at once, primarily to indoctrinate us into Hasidism, an ultra-conservative branch of Judaism. As I listened to him talk, as I learned that his wife and two little girls had been killed at Auschwitz, I decided, "The poor man has lost his mind." The war resulted in peculiar transformations; some of those who had been very religious before it started emerged after it was over as disillusioned atheists, while some of the previous agnostics were now devout believers.

Before that day was over Uncle Louie had visited Esther in the hospital, marched into the central office at the center, and established himself as the leader of the Hasidim at Feldafing. He immediately gained a large following, he and his devotees soon driving everyone to distraction with their daily pronouncements. They created laws governing every aspect of our life, especially the preparation of food, and spent a great amount of time in the kitchen supervising the cooking.

I tried to ignore my uncle and his beliefs as much as possible, having always been someone who took only the major Jewish laws to heart, until Uncle Louie began to focus his attention on me.

"Sereń," he said one day, "It's time you were married. I take it upon myself as your uncle to insure your marriage to a rabbi."

"What did you say?" I asked, not believing what I had heard.

your Samuel in Auschwitz. He told me all about you. One day before we evacuated the camp I saw him being taken to the crematorium."

"Oh! He was dead?"

"He must have been. He was on the cart that took the bodies to the furnaces each morning. Did you have such a cart at Ravensbrück?"

I shuddered, remembering the piles of bodies, the frozen arms, the open mouths and eyes. It was too much. I put my head in my arms and began to cry, sobbing for Samuel, for his kindness, for the losses that had no end.

"It's all right. I'll find a rabbi for you very shortly," Uncle Louie continued. "Many of the men are anxious to become married and establish homes. Right now I must inspect the kitchen again. No one washes the dishes exactly as I have prescribed. Think about what I have said, Sereń. I'm only thinking of your welfare."

As soon as he was out of the room I decided: I was leaving Feldafing. Esther was greatly improved and she and I wanted desperately to travel back to Hungary and then to Transylvania to look for our mother. I had not let go of the hope that she was still alive. If we persisted in looking we would find her. Drying my eyes, I went to tell Esther of my decision.

When I reached the hospital I was told that Esther had to be examined one more time before being dismissed. It was at this examination that our plans were thwarted. One of the doctors was not satisfied with her progress; her head was not healing properly. He advised that she be taken to Munich for testing. On the following day when she was examined slivers of metal still inside her head showed up clearly on the x-rays. She was immediately operated on and then brought back to Feldafing for recovery. For months she would not be able to leave the hospital. While I did not want to go home without Esther,

my days became long, the ache of loneliness, of empty idleness, pressing against my chest, heavy and unrelenting.

Then I learned that a trade school was being established for displaced persons like us at Waldheim, a village located about twenty miles from Feldafing. I knew immediately that I wanted to go there and become a teacher in the dressmaking division. Like the other teachers, I would not be paid, but I would be involved again in sewing and out among other working people. I could not wait to go. Briefly I considered taking the train there each morning and returning again at night, but as the trains were very unreliable, it might take me an entire day simply to reach Waldheim. I decided instead to take accommodations given in return for teaching at the school As these accommodations were with German citizens, I would be boarding with someone who surely still regarded me as the enemy. However, I was desperate to leave the communal life. I had had enough of living in camp situations with a large number of other people to last me a lifetime. When I asked Ellen if she would go with me, as she was also an accomplished seamstress, she declined. She had met a young man at Feldafing from the area where she had been born, and they were growing very fond of each other.

Early one morning at the beginning of August I left for Waldheim by myself, promising to come back and visit Esther and Ellen on the weekends. As soon as I arrived I reported to the ORT office, the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training. This was a women's organization founded in the United States to establish trade schools for all of the homeless persons who had survived the war. In the village of Waldheim this organization had obtained the use of a large hotel and set up classes in various assembly rooms. Mechanics was taught in one room, tailoring and dressmaking in another, carpentry in still

another. The dining hall remained as it was; we were given breakfast, dinner and supper there as most of us had been assigned single bedrooms having no cooking facilities. The bedroom I was given was in the house of an elderly German widow who avoided me completely. While her attitude disturbed me greatly, it was almost bearable considering that at last I had a room of my own where I could close the door and be entirely by myself. The choice of having either solitude or being with others was like a gift. Sometimes at night, however, as I lay on my bed in the still room, the widow sleeping behind the locked door of her room, I thought, "I'm lonely . . . so very lonely. If only I had a friend. . . . "

During the days my work completely absorbed me. Throughout the length of what had been the largest assembly hall in the hotel, sewing machines were set up on tables. At one end of the room I taught dressmaking to the few young girls who had survived; at the other end a man taught tailoring to young men. One day this man came over to me and said, "I've been watching you. You're very good with the students. Have you taught before?"

"A little," I answered, remembering how I had taught Emma and Esther in Reghinal-Sasesc. "Have you been here long?" I asked.

"I came here from Auschwitz as soon as the war ended," he answered. "I had nothing to do, no books to read. When the school opened I volunteered as a teacher and the ORT office put me in this room. I enjoy the work but I'm glad that you've come, too."

"Oh, I'm happy to be here! I have my own room. On the weekends I can see my sister in the hospital at Feldafing. I enjoy working very much. I can't stand not to work."

"That's exactly how I am! . . . How is your sister? Was she wounded?"

"Yes, in a bombing. We came from Ravensbrück to Türkheim and then Burgau. Finally they put us on a train again and left us in the locked cars. The train was bombed. She was hurt and has had several operations on her head. But she'll recover."

"I was also on a train for a long time just as the war was ending. We had been taken out of Auschwitz and were traveling west. One day the order was given to get out of the cars. The SS then lined us up by the side of the tracks and began shooting us. In the middle of it, when half of us were already dead, the American army came upon us and halted the shootings. I was so close to being killed! You must have been, too! Tell me. Why was your sister injured and not you? Was it just luck?"

"No, it was a piece of bread. I saw it on the ground, squeezed out of the opening on the locked car and reached for it. When the bombing started I slid under the train. The piece of bread saved me."

His face spread into a wide, open smile. "A piece of bread!" he laughed. "That's wonderful! By the way, my name is Meyer Bernstein. May I ask what is yours?"

"Sereń Tuvel."

"I'm very happy to meet you, Sereń." He held out his hand. I took it, looking into very dark eyes that for once were on the same level as mine. His hand was soft, gentle. I glanced at his curly, dark hair. "I'm very happy to meet you, too," I answered.

Over the next few weeks I gathered only small bits of information about the missing members of my family. One day Ellen burst into the room where I was teaching. "Sereń, you've received a letter!" she called as she walked

towards me. "I knew you would want it right away so I brought it to you. It came to Feldafing last night."

I tore it open. It was from my nieces Emma and Magda, Rose and Eugene's older daughters. Oh, I was happy to hear from them! I had regained two more members of my family. I skimmed through the letter quickly. Emma had been taken to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp after leaving us in Budapest. Some time later Magda was taken from Rose and Eugene at Reghinal-Sasesc and placed there. The two sisters were reunited.

I wrote back to her immediately, telling her that her father, Eugene, had been in Auschwitz with Joseph. I could tell her nothing about Rose.

Then Joseph came to see me one more time, bringing me news that there was no news. He had traveled all the way back to my former home in Valea Uzului, to the mill high above the valley floor, to the home of his parents, Herman and Tamara. He had found no one, nothing. The houses were empty, the furniture ransacked and broken, fragments of pottery scattered over the floors. My mother was not at our house nor Shlomo, Eliezer, Meyer, Mendel, Rose, Berta, Louise or any of their spouses or children. Joseph had hoped to find at least one of his brothers, Miksa or Ernie, but his home was silent, the only sound that of the wind blowing in through the open front door and out the back.

"It doesn't mean that they're all gone," he said. "Traveling is terribly difficult. They may be stuck somewhere, wondering if I'm alive. Or they may have gone to Palestine! That's what I think. They've gone to Palestine! I came to say goodbye, Sereń. I'm going there, too!"

"You are?" I asked, my voice full of sorrow. "I'm sad and happy for you at the same time."

"You'll always be my favorite aunt," he said then, touching my hand. "I brought you a farewell present." He unwrapped a package he had been holding in his hand. A length of green-flowered material fell out, spilled like spring flowers over the cutting table. "Oh, Joseph, it's beautiful!" I cried. "I haven't had material to sew a dress for so long!"

"I brought some for Esther, too. I'm going to see her in Feldafing before I leave. Will you visit me in Palestine someday, Seren?"

"I would love to, Joseph! I would love to!"

"I'll be waiting," he called and walked out of the room, waving at the door once, and then stepped out into the early afternoon light and was gone.

After Joseph left the loneliness that had been quietly building up like a great, white stone settled on my chest, weighing heavily on me all night long. I went back to my room, empty, silent, wondering, "How did it come to be that I who have always been surrounded by friends, by sisters and brothers, by nieces and nephews banging in and out of the front door and groups of cousins stringing along the lawn like a gaggle of geese, am so alone?" Except for the letter from Emma and Magda I heard from no one in my family; outside of Uncle Louie none of my relatives came to Feldafing. Years were to pass before I would be able to obtain any more information about my family. I never assumed that they were all gone. I never gave up hope. Nevertheless, I was by myself in a country that did not want me. If I or any other Jew entered one end of a train car the German civilians on board rushed to get off the car at the other end. Despite this, I traveled back to Feldafing to see Esther and Ellen every weekend.

Then, little by little, Meyer and I came to know each other, talking over dinner, over supper, after the work for the day was done. One day he asked

if he could accompany me to Feldafing. On the way there I told him all about Uncle Louie as we were sure to come across him. Although I tried to avoid Uncle Louie as much as possible, he sought me out constantly, reminding me repeatedly that he expected me to marry a rabbi. Fortunately Uncle Louie felt he had to be everywhere, supervising everyone, so he could not spend a great amount of time with me. However, it was enough to almost make me stay away from Feldafing.

When we arrived my worst fears materialized; Uncle Louie was waiting for me at the station, his long robes flowing in the late August wind. He stood by himself, separate, removed from all those who were not allowed to touch him, his hands folded together on his chest, smiling slightly like a benevolent dictator. As soon as he saw that I was with a man his smile faded, his eyes darkened and he strode up to us quickly.

"Whom have you brought along, Sereń?" he asked. "A friend of Esther's perhaps . . . or Ellen's?"

"Uncle Louie, I would like you to meet Meyer Bernstein," I answered. "He teaches tailoring at the school."

Meyer held out his hand. "I'm very happy to meet you," he said. "Sereń has told me a great deal about you."

My uncle ignored the hand. "You sound as if you might be from Lithuania, Mr. Bernstein. Is that correct?"

"Yes, it is. I come from an area in Lithuania near the border adjoining Poland."

"I see. And are you a rabbi who perchance has decided not to dress accordingly?"

"No, no, I'm not. I see that you are, though. At home we had a number

of learned men who were always arguing over the interpretation of Judaic law. Perhaps you could settle a question that . . . "

My uncle turned abruptly to face me. "I have met a suitable rabbi, Sereń. You are well aware of my meaning."

"I'm in a hurry!" I answered. "Meyer wants to visit the hospital with me and Esther is not always in her room. They often take her away for tests or examinations. We want to spend as much time as possible with her."

"Please remember who I am!" he answered, his long beard quaking. "I am your dear mother's brother! I am responsible for you. I take that responsibility very seriously!"

When I returned the following week, also with Meyer, Uncle Louie became furious. He followed us into the dining hall and immediately began reminding me of my obligations as a Jewish woman. Almost before I realized it, Meyer entered the conversation, citing one law after another from the Torah, reciting it first in Hebrew and then in Yiddish. Although he had told me that he spoke and read Hebrew, I did not realize how thoroughly he had studied the Torah. I sat back and watched as Uncle Louie stumbled around in Yiddish, grasping for the fragments of knowledge that he had picked up here and there. "This is wonderful!" I thought, a smile spreading across my face. "The young man who so angered my father as he stood at the window taunting us as we walked to Temple, who now insists that I marry a rabbi, is revealing himself to be almost totally ignorant of Judaic law." Of course, I realized that Meyer was deliberately trying to embarrass Uncle Louie.

Finally one Sunday afternoon Uncle Louie approached Meyer and me as we were descending the hospital steps hand in hand, skipping down like children. When we reached the bottom he said, "I have reached a decision. Since you

continue to defy me, Seren, since you continue to see this young man, I insist that the two of you be married here in Feldafing as soon as possible. I will marry you!"

I burst into laughter, knowing exactly what my uncle was thinking: as a nonbeliever I would not hesitate at moving in with Meyer without benefit of a marriage ceremony. I was still my mother and father's child; I would never go against what they had taught me. Obviously, however, Uncle Louie did not understand this.

"Is it so funny?" Uncle Louie asked them. "Am I too late?"

"No, no . . . " I answered, looking at Meyer. The two of us had an understanding, more unspoken than not, that we would marry each other someday.

"It could not please me more," Meyer said, looking into my eyes. "Why should we wait? What is there to wait for?" He looked down at his wrist briefly, fingering the tatoo with his free hand. He had been left with no one from his family, not one living relative. Turning to my uncle he said, "We would be honored to have you marry us."

At the beginning of October, two months after we met, six months after I entered the hospital at Saint Ottilien, Meyer and I were married. Before the ceremony Uncle Louie took me to the mikva, the bathhouse, where it was determined by a Jewish matron that I was at a time in my menstrual cycle suitable for marriage. When we returned he arranged for a chuppa and I chose my wedding dress. Two dresses were all I owned at the time, the one I had made from the print material Joseph brought me and a beige empire-waist dress with a high neckline and long sleeves that had been given to me at Feldafing. "Which one shall I wear?" I asked Esther as she sat in her hospital bed.

"The beige one," she answered. "It's so becoming on you."

"Really? I can actually look becoming? If only my hair had grown out more. A man was always attracted to my hair first. Meyer has only seen it short."

"Maybe he loves you, not your hair," she answered, smiling. She still wore the bandages all around her head. "He's a very lucky man."

I hugged her close, thinking of all we had been through together. She also had met a man who cared for her, bandages and all. "No, it's your young man who is lucky. He doesn't even know how lucky . . . "

As time for the wedding approached rain began pouring from the sky in great, gray streams. Ellen and I waited in Esther's room, Uncle Louie outside the door pacing up and down, his beard flapping behind him. Meyer was late. He had traveled to a neighboring village on the unpredictable train to accompany his attendants back to Feldafing. Every few minutes Uncle Louie charged to a window to see if Meyer and the other two men would materialize out of the falling water. I was not worried; I knew they would come. Uncle Louie, however, did not. "It's disgraceful!" he said over and over. "To be late for one's own wedding. It's entirely disgraceful."

Finally, an hour after the wedding was to begin, Meyer and his two friends came up the steps and into the hospital. The train had been stalled somewhere between the two towns. Immediately Esther, Ellen and I gathered up the chuppa, went out into the drenching rain and crossed the street, the men following behind. We all gathered in a small park across from the hospital. I donned a double heavy veil, as was the custom. As Esther, Ellen and several other women who had gathered to watch us took me around Meyer seven times I stumbled repeatedly, blinded by the veil and caught by the mud oozing in the water at our feet. Several times I would have fallen into the puddles if Ellen or Esther had not caught me.

At last my uncle began to intone the ceremony, the rain drumming against the top of the canopy, Meyer beside me, his hand in mine, Esther with her bandaged head on the other side, Ellen next to her. "We have come a long way," I thought as Uncle Louie's voice chanted above the rain. "We are almost whole again. If only my mother were here. . . . "

And then I remembered. How often she had said, "If you don't stop noshing from my pots it will pour on your wedding day!"

"She is here after all," I realized. "After it all, she is here. . . . "

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Now that I was married, now that I had someone with whom I could build a new life, I wanted only one more thing--to be able to leave Germany. Living in a country ravaged by war was difficult in itself, as all goods were scarce and strictly rationed. However, this would have been bearable if it had not been for the realization that Meyer and I, as well as all other Jews, were still not wanted. Overwhelmingly the German citizens believed that their Fuhrer had not shipped us to concentration camps for no reason whatsoever; we were murderers, we were thieves, we were "spoilers of the race" and it was to save mankind that we were starved to death or worked to death or died of utter despair.

One bitterly cold, late afternoon shortly after our marriage, Meyer and I decided to ride the streetcar to the new room we had been given. As we boarded it, two German men at the other end of the car started for the rear exit, as often happened when any Jews entered, but stopped near the door. The severe weather must have detained them. As we sank into the nearest seat, one of the men turned to the other and said in a loud voice, "Well, the war's over."

The second man glanced in our direction, pulling his black leather cap down over his ears. "Yes. Now the damn Jews have it all!"

That night as we sat over our dinner I said for the third time since breakfast, "Meyer, we've got to leave here."

He looked at me, put his fork down slowly and rested his hand on my

shoulder. "Sereń," he began, "I want to leave as much as you do. We've applied for visas to the United States. We've been placed on the waiting lists. What more can we do?"

"There must be something! How can we wait until our names reach the top of the list? It will be fifteen years!"

"The quotas have been set. If we had someone in the United States to sponsor us, we could be placed on a preference list, but we don't."

I turned slightly from him, looking out into the dark night. "Sometimes I'm afraid. We're still in the same country as the camps. We're with the same people. Who is sure that it won't all begin again?"

"No one," he answered, dropping his hand. "No one."

If we could have lived in our own apartment, however small, we could have created a quiet haven in which to wait out the fifteen years. Rather Meyer and I were given a room, only slightly larger than the one I had as a single person, in the home of a German family. As soon as the head of the house learned that we were to be living in his spare bedroom, he walled off his living quarters from us, dividing the house in two. On his side were the rooms for him and his family, on ours the room of an elderly German widow, our room and a small, shared kitchen where the widow and I took turns cooking.

We did not see the face of the widow for two months. Early every morning she rushed into the kitchen as soon as the gas lines were opened. The gas was rationed and available only for an hour in the morning and an hour again in the evening. After hurriedly fixing herself breakfast, the widow scurried back into her room, plate in hand, as soon as she heard my footsteps approaching the kitchen door. I entered the kitchen to the sounds of her door

being banged shut quickly followed by the clicking of a lock and the gliding of a heavy, metal bolt.

Partly I understood the widow's fear of us as she, like many of the other German people, appeared to be quiet and refined, preferring an orderly, reserved life. Suddenly thrust upon her had been us and the other displaced Jews, some of whom were young, unruly men of seventeen and eighteen. These men had been young boys of thirteen and fourteen when they had been taken into Auschwitz and had learned to survive by becoming rough and somewhat crude, frightening the Germans with their rowdiness even though they did not harm anyone. What angered me was the widow's assumption that Meyer and I were like these young men, and, given the chance, would pounce upon her demanding exclusive use of the kitchen. As it was, she often left me with only a few minutes to cook while the gas was still flowing.

Many times if I did have gas to cook, I did not have any food to prepare. Everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike, was given ration cards to be redeemed for such things as butter, eggs, milk, vegetables and meat. Every night after leaving the training school I stood in long lines at the markets. Meyer and I could have continued to eat at the dining room of the training school in lieu of receiving coupons, but after all the years of eating mass-prepared food amid hundreds of other people, I wanted so much to make dinner for just the two of us.

As I waited in these lines for an hour or two each evening, slowly moving to the front, I saw each of the German housewives ahead of me present their coupons and receive the groceries. However, almost every time I reached the head of the line, the clerk behind the counter told me he had just run out. The village being quite small, everyone knew who I was. There was no point in

arguing with him for I had no way to prove whether or not he was, indeed, out of food.

One chilly, damp evening in late November, nearly two months after Meyer and I were married, I climbed the stairs to our room feeling completely discouraged. After I had stood in the butter line for an hour, seeing every German woman in front of me receive her one-fourth pound ration, the clerk announced to me, "I just ran out." When I reached the head of the meat line the clerk took my coupon from my outstretched hand, glanced up at my face and then handed it back to me. "Out!" he said quickly.

Then, as I reached the top of the stairs and came into the kitchen, wondering what I could scrape together for dinner, the widow ducked her head and began to run towards her door. Something in me snapped. In a rush I dashed in front of her and planted myself in front of her door, blocking her exit. She stopped abruptly and drew her arms around herself, trembling.

"Now you listen to me!" I began. "Ever since we moved in here you've been acting like I'll attack you with a butcher knife. If anyone should be frightened, it should be me! It's your people who brought us here in locked cars. It's your people who killed my people. I didn't ask to be brought here. I was perfectly happy in my home in Transylvania!"

I stopped. The widow was now covering her face with her hands. "Please look at me," I continued in a softer tone, knowing she was terrified. "I have hands, like you. I have a face, like you. I am human. If you hit me, I hurt . . . "

She looked me in the eyes for the first time. "Why do you run away from me?" I asked.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I thought you might harm me . . . I'm very sorry." Then she went into her room.

The next morning, however, she did not flee the kitchen when I entered. Gradually we began conversing politely. When she learned how I was turned away in the markets, she offered to take my coupons and redeem them. When she realized what an inept cook I was she said one evening, "Why don't you let me prepare dinner for the three of us. You must be tired after teaching all day. Let me cook." Of course, I let her. She was an extraordinarily good cook, having worked in the kitchen of a German baron most of her life. Gradually she even taught me how to prepare delicious meals. The dishes I still cook today are some of the ones she taught me how to make--chicken with egg noodles, potato and cheese casserole, delicate cabbage rolls.

By spring of the new year I knew that I was with child. The widow, Anna, was overjoyed. I was not so sure of my feelings, of bringing a child into the midst of a people who would regard him or her as one of the enemy.

At the same time I came to know Sophia, the wife of the tailor who worked with Meyer on the other side of the room from me at the training school. She and I became friends and enjoyed sitting together at noon over our lunches. When I told her of my pregnancy she said, "I don't want children!" and walked away. As my pregnancy advanced, Sophia seemed more and more uncomfortable with me. Finally one day I asked her, "Don't you like children?"

Her eyes darted quickly to mine, the pupils small and dark. Just as rapidly she looked away again, gazing out over the dining room tables, her whole body taut. "I don't want any children!" she said again.

I was afraid to ask, "Did you once have a child?" Anything could have happened. Sophia was also Jewish and had survived the war by hiding in a cellar somewhere in Poland after her husband was taken to Auschwitz. He had survived and gone to their home after the war to find her waiting for him.

Sophia, still gazing out over the tables, began to speak in a quiet, detached tone as if someone else were speaking through her. "After my husband was taken away I found a hiding place with a Gentile family. This family hid many other Jews and me in a secret basement room. It was cold, so very cold. But we had nowhere else to go. The wife sneaked food to us whenever she could. She had to be so careful.

"Every few days a troop of soldiers would storm into the house and search every room. Our basement room was well hidden behind a pile of coal, but we had to be very quiet while the soldiers were there or they would have heard us. The walls in the house were thin.

"My little girl was with me. Her name was Azarella. She was only two years old and the soldiers terrified her . We could hear their heavy boots tramping, tramping, tramping over our heads. Azarella would begin to whimper and I had to whisper to her to be quiet. I would hold her on my lap and say, 'Shhh, my baby . . . Shhh, Azarella . . . It's all right . . . ' Finally she would stop crying and bury her head in my arms.

"Then late one night the soldiers came back only a few hours after they had left. We were terrified! We were almost positive that this time they would find us. Azarella must have sensed our great fear for she began to sob. First I tried whispering to her as before saying, 'Shhhh! Shhh!' but her sobs only grew louder. I was becoming desperate. The others were threatening to take her away from me if I did not keep her quiet. They even tried to grab her! I put my hands on her mouth but still she sobbed, louder and louder. I imagined the soldiers stopping quite suddenly, hearing her, and charging down the steps to our room.

"I pressed harder, shifting my hands slightly, and willed her to stop.

'You must not cry. They will find us! You must not cry. They will find us!' I said to myself over and over. She stopped crying.

"After a few more minutes we heard the footsteps becoming fainter and fainter and finally, they were gone. I let out a long, deep sigh, relaxed my hands and whispered, 'There, Azarella . . . It's all right . . . There, baby . . . ' She lay quite still against my breast, her head down, my hands on her neck.

"'Azarella! Azarella!' I screamed. She did not answer. She was dead."

Sophia stopped talking and sat as before, rigid, staring out across the room. We sat together for five minutes, ten. Silence hung thick and heavy in the room. Tears began washing down her face and hurriedly she brushed them away. "It wasn't your fault," I said then, taking her hand in mine.

She pulled it away, shoved her chair out from the table with a jerk, stood up and ran to the other side of the room and out the door. I sat there for a moment or two longer, thinking of the baby growing within me. "If it's a boy," I decided, "we'll name him Jacob after Meyer's father."

One day that same spring I came home to find a letter waiting for me. While I did not recognize the handwriting immediately, I felt instinctively that it was from someone who had known me before the war. Small miracles still happened: a man finally traced his wife to another country where she had been taken after liberation, a sister discovered a sister in a remote village, a friend found a friend. Maybe the letter was from Eugene or Berta's husband or even from one of my brothers. I tore it open. "My dearest Sereń," it began. It was from Samuel!

> I am so very, very happy that I have found you again! After liberation from Auschwitz I went to your apartment building in Budapest looking for you. No one was there. But I never gave up hope that you were still alive. I found out that Lily's mother was in Sweden and I wrote to her there. She replied that you had written her about Lily's death (I was so sad to hear that) and gave me your address. I knew you would make it! I can't wait to see you again.

Slowly I folded the letter and placed it back in the envelope. How could Uncle Louie have told me he saw Samuel's body on the cart going to the crematorium? Perhaps he did not see it at all and made up the story so I would marry a rabbi. But then again, maybe he thought he saw Samuel's body after all. The war had so interchanged life and death that they were almost indistinguishable.

It did not matter. I was married to Meyer. In a few more months our child would be born. Sliding the letter under several scarves in a bottom dresser drawer, I whispered, "Find someone else, Samuel. Be happy . . . " I did not look at it again.

Shortly after Meyer and I were married, Esther had finally been discharged from the hospital at Feldafing and had moved into my old room in Waldheim. Both she and Ellen, who remained at Feldafing, could talk of nothing but the young men they had met in the hospital. "Sidney needs me," Esther said on Sunday afternoon over tea. "He lost his wife and two little boys at Auschwitz . . . And I need him."

"So what are you waiting for?" I asked. "Marry him!"

She laughed, blushing, looking so healthy and happy that I could not quite believe it was her. "We want to be married by a rabbi . . . "

"Not Uncle Louie!" I interrupted.

"Not Uncle Louie!" she answered. "The only other one nearby is in Munich. Will you and Meyer come with us if we are married there?"

I grabbed her by the cheeks and drew her to me across the table. "We would love to!"

"Ellen and Ben are engaged, too! I think we will all be married on the same day, but they're going to be married at Feldafing."

"By Uncle Louie?"

"By Uncle Louie."

"Well," I answered, "We'll have to wish them the best!"

On the one day between Passover and Pentecost when marriages are allowed, Meyer and I accompanied Esther and Sidney to Munich and back. When we returned a friend of Esther's and I prepared a wedding dinner with food that Meyer had purchased on the Black Market. Previously I had refused to have anything to do with this corruption, but for this occasion I relented. To the four pounds of beef Meyer brought home I added struetzels made of flour and fresh eggs, creating a wonderful Hungarian stew. We invited a few friends, uncorked a bottle or two of wine and feasted long into the night. As Esther, beautiful with her hair growing back in dark curls circling her face, rose from the table to go, she said very softly, "This was the nicest wedding anyone could ever have. . . . "

A few months later, in September, at the beginning of the eighth month of my pregnancy, our baby was born. Meyer had accompanied me to Saint Ottilien, the hospital where I had recovered after liberation, as soon as the contractions started. There I gave birth to a boy. He was so small in my arms, his dark, dark hair brushing against the white pillow. He was absolutely perfect, the doctor assuring me that he showed no signs of prematurity.

"He's the very image of you!" I told Meyer when he came to visit.

"Look at his eyes!" They were a deep brown, as dark as the burl of a tree growing high on a mountain slope.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes . . . like my father's."

And when I looked again, I saw my mother's eyes as well.

The doctor would not allow me to take Jacob out of the hospital when a week had passed and I was more than ready to return home. "You must leave him here," he said. "He's too small. You can take him home when he gains another pound. He only weighs four pounds now."

"Absolutely not!" I said. "If I go home, so does my baby!"

"I must insist that he stay here," the doctor answered. "It is our policy to keep a premature baby until he attains a weight of five pounds."

"Then I'll stay with him. I won't leave him."

The doctor shrugged his hands and walked out of the room.

After another week Jacob and I went home together. He thrived, snug in his basket at the school where I continued to teach part-time. In the evenings he was rocked to sleep in the arms of Anna. On Sundays Esther and Ellen fought over him all day long.

Three months later, in December, Esther and Sidney received permission to emigrate. A friend of Sidney's in the United States had agreed to sponsor them and they would settle near Chicago where a job was waiting. "Oh, Esther!" I cried when she told me. "I'm so happy for you!" For the most part, in the deepest part of my heart, I was overjoyed that they would be able to leave Germany for the freedom of the United States. But I knew I would miss her terribly and a part of me already grieved. She would be an ocean away from me. A week later Ellen and her husband received word that they would be able to leave as well.

As soon as Esther and Sidney were settled in Hyde Park, a community on the south side of Chicago, she began sending me packages--woolen pants for Jacob, warm scarves for Meyer and me, exotic canned goods that she purchased in this brave, new world. "I know you will be able to leave Germany some day, too," she wrote. "Please don't give up hope. . . . "

"No, I won't give up," I answered in my letters, but in fact, I had. How could we keep on hoping when the quotas remained unchanged, when neither of us had anyone to sponsor us, when every month a fellow survivor left for the United States or Canada or South America? A few others continued to enter Palestine clandestinely, but I would not even consider the risks involved. I could not bear the thought of being caught and put into a detention camp at Cyprus, of having Meyer and Jacob taken from me.

I continued to teach part-time at the training school, to care for Jacob, to spend an evening out with Meyer once in a while. Anna had become entirely devoted to Jacob and he to her. When he began to crawl he would thump his little body to her door as soon as I put him down on the floor and then pound on it with both fists. She would open it immediately, as if waiting for him, and scoop him up in her arms, crying, "Jacob! Jacob! Jacob!" The first word he said was her name, "Ann . . . nah!" Often she chased us into the night with a "Go! Go! Enjoy yourself!" so she could have Jacob all to herself.

We would walk to the theater, watch a light comedy, even laugh, come home, retrieve Jacob, and go to bed. But I seldom slept through the night. Again and again I sank into a deep sleep, into a pit, hearing above me the pile of frozen bodies beginning to topple, seeing them fall one after the other, stiff arms and legs coming closer and closer, the eyes still open.

"No! No!" I screamed, waking in a cold sweat. Meyer would draw me to him and assure me that it was only a dream. If I fell asleep again I dreamed of ghosts running in the rain.

Spring finally came again . . . even summer. I went to the school each afternoon, carrying Jacob in my arms, and continued to teach. But my heart was not in my work. One by one even my students left for Australia or South America, the bravest ones to Palestine. Fall came and Jacob began to walk. When winter returned once more I wanted to retreat into our room, close the door and crawl under the covers to wait. I could not bear the thought of year after year going by and the three of us remaining in such a hostile land with no family, little work and no hope.

Then one evening Meyer bounded up the stairs and into our room while I was putting Jacob to sleep. "I've just come from the American Army Office!" he said. "And you know what?"

I stared at him, waiting for him to continue. His eyes were sparkling and bits of snow glistened in his dark hair. He was smiling at me, waiting for me to ask. "No, of course I don't know what! Tell me!" I said.

"The officer had just posted a new notice when I came. It said that the Amalgamated Workers' Union of Canada wants to sponsor tailors. They're giving a test at our school next month. Whoever passes it will be able to immigrate to Canada!"

"Meyer!" I shouted, waking Jacob who began to cry. "Is this true? Are you sure? You wouldn't tease me, would you?"

"It's true! I read the notice three times to be sure." He grabbed both Jacob and me and swung us round and around the room until we all collapsed on the bed.

"Will you pass the test? Will it be difficult?" I asked, suddenly afraid.

"Am I such a bad tailor?"

"No. No. I just can't believe it!"

"So, we'll see," he answered. "We'll just have to wait and see."

The test was given and while Meyer was confident that he had passed, I was terrified that he had not. The test had been only for men or I would have taken it, too. Jacob was growing older and I so wanted him to spend his youth in a country where he could live without fear, without seeing hatred in the eyes of every passing stranger.

Finally the results were announced. Meyer had passed. Immediately the Canadian government applied for our visas. When they arrived we were asked to come to the Canadian Council in Munich. As we walked out of the office, the visas in our hands, I felt as if even impossible longings can be realized.

In the late winter of 1949 we said goodbye to Anna. Tears streamed down her face as she asked over and over, "You will write, won't you?"

"Yes! Yes!" I answered her each time.

After taking the train to Bremen-Hofen, we boarded a large military ship, the General Sturgiss, for the eleven day journey to Hallifax, Nova Scotia. Over two hundred other families were on the ship as well, one hundred twenty Jewish families and the remainder non-Jewish, all emigrating to Canada. As soon as we were aboard, the families were separated, the men put into cramped quarters in the bottom of the ship and the women and children in small cabins. It was almost as if we were in a camp once more for every morning a large, rough Polish woman, reminding me almost more than I could bear of an SS

woman at Ravensbrück, checked each cabin. The room had to be spotless and I spent most of my time trying to keep it so.

Meyer was equally frustrated for even though our fares were to be deducted from his pay once he began working in Canada, all of the men were expected to paint the ship every day. On the second day of our voyage he came to my cabin early in the morning and said, "Give Jacob to me. I'll take care of him." Thereafter when anyone asked why he was not painting, he replied, "My wife is so ill. The trip is very difficult for her. She hasn't been well." He did not have to paint again.

The voyage was quite rough, the ship heaving back and forth all day long and throughout the night as well. While I did not become sick as Meyer said, not becoming ill ever again once I was out of the camps, I could not rest. Jacob was in a crib beside my bunk and as the ship tossed, it rolled back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. I was afraid that the crib would crash into a wall and Jacob hurt.

One night I decided, "This has to stop!" I jumped out of bed and searched through a trunk until I found a length of rope. With three, strong knots I tied the crib to my iron bunk bed and it stood firm while the ship swayed. With a sigh I climbed back into bed, confident of finally sleeping through the night without hearing the bed rolling.

A few hours later I woke up, sensing that something was wrong. In the pitch black I reached out my hand towards the crib. Nothing was there. How could it have disappeared? My heart pounding, I crawled out of bed and hurriedly found a flashlight in my suitcase. Flicking it on I moved the beam of light over the floor. Here was one side of the crib, there another, there still a third. The crib had been torn apart by the ship's rocking. But where

was Jacob? Then my beam of light found him sitting in the middle of the floor, smiling. He was pointing one finger at the flickering ray. Sweeping him up in my arms, I took him into bed with me. The rest of the voyage I kept him with me every night.

On a clear, icy morning, the wind whipping across my face in an unrelenting stream of frigid air, I stood on deck waiting for the first glimpse of land. It was the eleventh day. I could not quite believe the long years of waiting would be over in an hour, two. Meyer was beside me, one hand in mine, the other holding Jacob to his chest. "Is he too cold?" I asked. "Feel his face."

"He's fine!" Meyer answered. "He'll be a big, strong boy, won't you, Jacob?" He wrapped the scarf around Jacob's neck a little tighter.

I gazed out over the gray slate expanse of ocean and air, my mind easing out past the water, the wide, rolling sea. A memory began to drift over me, mingling with the sea spray, the wind. Once again the gypsy fortune teller was sitting in my mother's warm kitchen holding my hand in hers, her silver bracelets jingling, my mother smiling at me from across the long table. "You will cross a big body of water someday," the gypsy said.

Meyer squeezed my hand. "Are you all right?" he asked.

I nodded my head, yes.

"Look!" he shouted then, releasing my hand and pointing into the distance. "I think I can see it. Over there! It's very dim, but I think that's the land."

And there it was--our new home slowly taking form out of the air, the mass of land becoming dark and clear on the light horizon.

"Do you see!" he asked, throwing his head back, his eyes bright in the cold wind.

"Yes!" I answered. "I see!"

He held me close for a long moment. "You look well," he said then, wiping the tears from his own eyes. "I'm so happy you are here."

Shlomo and his wife took me back to their home. Everyone else followed, pouring into the house, spilling out into the yard and lawn, eating and laughing and becoming reacquainted all afternoon and long into the night. Shlomo's wife Sylvia was a lovely, young woman who kept bringing in chocolate cake, apple pie and dark bread with cheese as we talked. I would not finish chatting with one nephew or his wife and another would come up to me.

"Sereń," Joseph said, drawing me to him again. "I knew you would come someday, just as I knew you would make it through the war. Do you remember the times I found you? Do you remember the photograph I carried in my shoe?"

"Oh, Joseph," I answered, cupping his beautiful face in my hands, a face combining Herman's fair radiance and Tamara's laughing grace. "I've never forgotten you. Never!"

"You're still my favorite aunt," he said. "Do you believe that?"

"Yes, yes, I believe it."

"Good! The day after tomorrow, when you've had a chance to rest, I'm going to come in my car and we're going sightseeing! Is it all right?"

I nodded my head, beginning to cry again.

Eliezer approached me quickly and held out his handkerchief, looking at me with moist eyes but saying nothing. I laughed despite the tears. "Eliezer," I said, "You are still a 'la un caos linguritza . . . a teaspoonful every hour.' That's how many words you give us. Do you remember when Mama called you that?" I asked, taking his hand.

Perhaps Shlomo and I would have been friends at home if our father had not sent him to the yeshiva at the age of eight.

Now he sat across the table from me, smiling, asking questions that any brother might ask a sister, pretending that it had not been thirty years and so many losses since we had last seen each other.

"How is Meyer?" he asked. "I hope he is well."

"He's fine," I answered. "He works hard. His tailoring shop always has a customer waiting for him when he comes in the morning."

"That's good. And the children?"

"Jacob is almost eighteen already and Marlana is thirteen. You should see her. She is beautiful like our mother, like her grandmother. I named Marlana for her . . . Oh, I just remembered! I brought a present for you from all of us. I forgot to give it to you last night." Jumping up from the table I ran to the bedroom and came back with the gift.

"You didn't have to bring me anything," Shlomo said as I handed it to him. "I want to see you. I don't need anything, just you--having you here with our family again."

"It's nothing! Open it."

Slowly he unwrapped the present. A pair of pajamas were exposed bit by bit--first, the black stripes, then, the white spaces. He handed the package back to me, "Here," he said softly. "You give these to someone who can use them. I don't need them. I have everything I need. You're here. That's fine."

Instantly I realized that I had given him pajamas with stripes. Surely he had worn similar ones in Auschwitz, worn them as his wife and son were fed to the ovens. I had not even thought of the stripes when I bought them; they were simply something I could afford.

As I stood among everyone, often laughing and crying at the same time, a small, older woman, her gray hair curling in fine wisps from the edge of a deep blue scarf, came up to me. "Please forgive me," she said. "I know you have your family here. I wanted to say hello and then I'll be on my way." She paused and looked down at her hands, clasping and unclasping them several times. "I went to school with your mother," she said then. "She was a dear friend . . . " Her voice choked. She patted my hand twice with her soft, light fingers and turned to leave.

"Wait," I called, touching her on the shoulder. She turned back, her eyes misted, dim. I pulled her to me, held her as if I had my mother once more in my arms. "Thank you for coming," I said. "Thank you for everything."

The next evening Joseph and I sat together at the dining room table. I was becoming exhausted from all the visiting, but I welcomed the opportunity to talk to Joseph privately. "Joseph," I began, "there are so many details about the war that I don't know. I have been in Canada all these years, not knowing. In their letters Shlomo and Eliezer write only of their work or of the weather. Can I ask you? Will you tell me?"

He took my hand. "My wife and I have to leave for home in a few minutes. I'm sorry. But someone will talk to you."

"Will I see you again?"

"Of course."

Late that night Miksa and I found ourselves together in the living room, everyone else having gone to bed. Sensing that he had remained to talk with me, I moved my chair closer to his, watching the fire quietly burning in the grate before us, and waited.

"I thought you might have some questions," he said after a few minutes. He glanced at me and then settled back into his chair.

As I stood among everyone, often laughing and crying at the same time, a small, older woman, her gray hair curling in fine wisps from the edge of a deep blue scarf, came up to me. "Please forgive me," she said. "I know you have your family here. I wanted to say hello and then I'll be on my way." She paused and looked down at her hands, clasping and unclasping them several times. "I went to school with your mother," she said then. "She was a dear friend . . . " Her voice choked. She patted my hand twice with her soft, light fingers and turned to leave.

"Wait," I called, touching her on the shoulder. She turned back, her eyes misted, dim. I pulled her to me, held her as if I had my mother once more in my arms. "Thank you for coming," I said. "Thank you for everything."

The next evening Joseph and I sat together at the dining room table. I was becoming exhausted from all the visiting, but I welcomed the opportunity to talk to Joseph privately. "Joseph," I began, "there are so many details about the war that I don't know. I have been in Canada all these years, not knowing. In their letters Shlomo and Eliezer write only of their work or of the weather. Can I ask you? Will you tell me?"

He took my hand. "My wife and I have to leave for home in a few minutes. I'm sorry. But someone will talk to you."

"Will I see you again?"

"Of course."

Late that night Miksa and I found ourselves together in the living room, everyone else having gone to bed. Sensing that he had remained to talk with me, I moved my chair closer to his, watching the fire quietly burning in the grate before us, and waited.

"I thought you might have some questions," he said after a few minutes. He glanced at me and then settled back into his chair.

"I remember her very faintly, but it seems she was very beautiful."

"She was . . . oh, she was so full of life . . . I couldn't save her. I wanted to desperately, but I couldn't. She was shot, you know."

"Yes, Joseph told me. It does no good to feel guilty. I couldn't save Mama and Papa either. I was in prison when they were taken." He took my hand in both of his and held it firmly.

"You look so like Herman, like your father. Has anyone ever told you that?" I asked.

"Yes . . . often. Our first son is named Herman after his grandfather. I wish you could meet him. He's in the Israeli Army."

"Were you here for the war of 1948?"

"Yes, we fought in it."

"All of you?"

"Yes, for Israel. In the war of 1956 as well.

"Did you ever find out what happened to your mother and father?" I asked.

"They were taken from the ghetto in Reghinal-Sasesc, probably in 1944. I was arrested much earlier, before the ghetto was made, and taken to Budapest. Emma and I were in the same prison. Once I caught a glimpse of you and Esther when you came to visit Emma."

"Miksa," I said then, looking into his blue eyes. "I saw your mother's coat, the jacket I made for your mother, Tamara, at Ravensbrück. One day I was standing in zielappel, and I saw it on the back of a woman who had just been sent from Auschwitz. I would have known that coat anywhere."

Miksa's hand tightened on mine until my fingers ached, but I did not try to pull it away. We sat for a long time, staring into the fire, tears running down our cheeks in silent streams.

to Miksa. "You and Joseph and Ernie are such good, fine men. Herman and Tamara would be so proud if they knew."

"They know. I'm sure of it," he answered, kissing me on the cheek.

When the two weeks of my trip were over, two of the most joyous weeks in my entire life, I left them all--my brothers, my sisters-in-law, my nephews and cousins, promising to return with Meyer and the children soon. As I looked back at them standing in the airport terminal as they had at my arrival, I thought, "How can I leave them? I have my family back again!" I waved once more and walked into the plane.

EPILOGUE

For many years I could not think about the war. Every time I closed my eyes, especially while we still lived in Germany, the images of those ghost-like skeletons running in the rain after our train was bombed floated before my eyes. On my second trip to Israel I learned that Shlomo and Eliezer had both been in a rear car on the same train as I. Perhaps this is why that nightmare continued to haunt me. My brothers had been only a few meters away from me, but we would not have recognized each other even if we had found one another. My brothers were the skeletons.

As the years went by and I became the mother of another child, merely taking care of the two children filled almost all of my time. If one was not ill, it was the other. I continued my dressmaking business as well, sewing at night when the children were asleep. When they grew older I opened my own shop. If I had been forced to do nothing I might not have kept my sanity. I will always be grateful to my children and to my work.

I am somewhat proud of Esther, Ellen and myself. We did not let ourselves be dragged either into selfishness or into despair. Then again, maybe we were simply lucky. Life was abruptly taken away from so many. We were fortunate in that we were allowed to live, however minimally.

I continue to work, to enjoy being with my husband and children, to see Esther and Ellen and their families as often as possible. In 1960 we were allowed to emigrate to the United States and moved near Esther and Sidney and their two sons. Ellen and her husband live in Philadelphia where their oldest

son is a student at the yeshiva. Whenever they come to visit me we sit together around my dining room table, the dirty dishes left sitting as they are, and reminisce. The children are herded into the next room so they will not hear of our suffering, but mostly we try to remember the better times.

"I can still see you walking around with that black kettle on your head in labor camp!" Esther will say.

"Oh, I thought of that last week," Ellen will answer. "I burst out laughing just thinking of it."

"I didn't lose my head to a bomb, did I?" I ask.

"No," they agree and we all laugh again.

There are a few things Meyer and I will not do: stand in long lines, use metal dishes, eat turnips, read books or watch movies about the Holocaust, watch violent movies. The Viet Nam War sickened me at heart. I could not bear to watch the news again until it was over. Otherwise we go about our lives quite peacefully.

Best of all, we have been blessed with a grandchild. A girl, Rebecah, was born to our son Jake and his wife Linda last December--a Hanuakkah baby. I am probably the most outrageous grandmother you may ever see, singing Yiddish rhymes, clapping my hands at Becky for hour after hour. I cannot get enough of her! Others tell me she has the same eyes as I--always full of adventure and asking, "What can I do next?" She is a wonderful, delightful gift to me after so much, after all these years. I am happy simply holding her hand.